

BUILDING RESILIENCE THROUGH RELATIONAL PRACTICES: IMAGINING
INTENTIONAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY FOR RETURNING CITIZENS IN AN AGE OF
MASS INCARCERATION

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Abstract

This dissertation is a practical theological project that strives to bring into conversation the cultural issues of mass incarceration and the lived experience of women who are returning citizens after being sentenced to life and serving decades in prison before being released. This project is both constructive and critical as I use qualitative research methods to gather the stories of female returning citizens relating their experience of relationship and community before, during and after incarceration in order to develop thick descriptions of the experience of incarceration and reentry for women who have lived as incarcerated people without a guaranteed condition of release. The experience of the women who participated in this project demonstrate that during their time in prison they experienced trauma due to incarceration, but also rich relationships and enduring friendships built over time within hostile conditions. These friendships sustained them both while they were incarcerated and after their release. Therefore, this project brings into conversation the lived experience of the research partners with an understanding of trauma in light of the Christian narrative developed by the collective work of pastoral theologians. It then turns to the work of D.W. Winnicott and others whose work is concerned with the ways that we grow and thrive through the foundation of secure relationship to propose how to develop an intentional Christian community with strong relational practices and an orientation toward relational resilience. Finally, this project offers a model of how an intentional Christian community that is concerned with transformation enacted through a deliberative theology of redemption and atonement could be established through *1001 New Worshipping Communities*—a movement of the Presbyterian Church (USA). The proposed community has the potential to offer an opportunity for returning citizens and others to worship

and disciple together toward the telos of personal and social transformation particularly concerning conditions of mass incarceration.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Context

A car accident caused by drunk driving initiated Kate's call to the pastoral counseling institute where I was doing my residency in Spiritually Integrative Psychotherapy. At the time she called, I was in my second year of my residency, and I had a reputation for working with women transitioning out of prison—particularly those who had received life sentences. I remember the feeling in the room during Kate's initial sessions. There were a lot of questions concerning whether two people from two vastly different backgrounds and dissimilar life experiences could come together through pastoral counseling to produce help and guidance to someone who was experiencing so much suffering.

I was a doctoral student in a Practical Theology program, and Kate was an exoneree who had been tried and convicted of murder. She had received a sentence of thirty-two years to life and served seventeen years in prison before being released. Kate was innocent of the crime but, after working through the court system and losing all of her appeals, she was facing the very real possibility of spending the rest of her life in prison. She was finally exonerated and released from prison in 2002. Following her exoneration, Kate wrote a book about her experience. Her story has also been told on many television shows including "Death Row Stories." In one article she is quoted as saying this about her experience of facing life in prison: "The worst was about seven years in," she says. "It happens to lifers between five and seven years. I guess reality hits you in the face. You lose all hope. You lose everything."¹

¹ Footnote redacted to protect privacy.

Kate is distinct from the other previously-incarcerated women I saw during my two-year pastoral counseling residency at The Clinebell Institute in that she is an exoneree, and the other women I saw for pastoral counseling were all paroled decades after receiving life sentences. However, her experience of feeling a loss of hope while in prison and her struggles following release were characteristic of the many women I worked with as they transitioned out of prison in their efforts to find connection to a community that would come alongside them and help them feel connected to the world outside of prison after being separated from it for decades.

I started my pastoral counseling residency at The Clinebell Institute in 2010. The first client assigned to me when I began my residency was a woman who had been recently released from prison after being convicted of the crime of being complicit in the murder of her young child. After working with this client, I began to request that my client list include as many “lifers” as possible.

During my residency at The Clinebell Institute, I was able to have multiple “lifers” on my caseload at any given time. Clinebell works in partnership with Crossroads, Inc., a temporary home for women as they transition out of prison, which also provides low-cost individual and group counseling to the women in the program. Typically, this meant that doctoral student counselors started seeing women in individual counseling within a week of their release from prison and worked with them weekly for the next six months.

Through the stories the women told me in these counseling sessions, I learned very quickly that for lifers the political is personal. Jerry Brown was then the governor of California, and his practice of releasing lifers was far different than those of his predecessors, Governors Davis and Schwarzenegger. In contrast to his predecessors, Governor Brown’s practice was to grant parole to people who had been convicted of murder, which led to a shift in the needs for

services provided by those organizations who were tasked with the responsibility of helping previously-incarcerated people make the transition from prison to life outside of prison.

I had been told time and again that women who had been incarcerated for decades and who did not know their “out date” when they arrived serve time differently than those who are incarcerated for shorter and more defined periods of time. I also noted that the struggles affecting the women I counseled through their transition had to do with the fact that programs to serve the needs of the recently incarcerated seemed to be geared toward people who had served shorter sentences than these women as people serving shorter sentences were the population these programs had been serving for years. Much of the focus and structure of the transitional program were experienced by the women as serving needs they did not feel were their own, as the program seemed to have been designed to prevent recidivism and support sobriety. As I listened to so many lifers tell me that the structure of their program was not salient to their needs, I intentionally started to listen for what was important to women who had been separated from the world they had lived in for decades.

As I continued to work with “lifers,” I was repeatedly struck by the ways these women had found to struggle with issues that are deeply existential and related to faith. Since most had been convicted of participating in the murder of a human being, they grappled with issues of life, death, redemption, forgiveness and atonement in ways that many (if not most) adults, even within religious communities, do not. Most of these women had gone before the parole board multiple times before being recommended for release. Each time they did so, they were tasked with demonstrating self-understanding, insight, and remorse for the crime they were convicted of committing.

Focus of Project and Practical Theology

This dissertation is a practical theological project that strives to bring into conversation the cultural issues of mass incarceration and the lived experience of women who are returning citizens after serving decades of their life sentences in prison before being released and looking toward the possibilities for transformation through the creation of intentional Christian community. As a practical theological endeavor, this project is focused on transformation. John Swinton identifies the task of practical theology that drives this project when he wrote: “The primary task of Practical Theology is not simply to see differently, but to enable that revised vision to create changes in the way that Christians and Christian communities perform the faith.”²

Conversation Partners

In this project, I am bringing into conversation a thick description of the lived experience of four women who have re-entered society after living for decades under conditions of incarceration. My data is comprised of four semi-structured interviews that I conducted individually as well as from the clinical work that I did with women during my residency at The Clinebell Institute. I will be referring to these women from here on out as returning citizens. I have decided to use this term, which was clearly preferred by one of my research partners and is also used by scholars and activists in their work about incarceration and reentry. My reasons for doing so I hope will become clear through the discussion in this project of mass incarceration, collateral consequences of incarceration (both discussed in chapter three), and the ways in which

² John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2015), Kindle, Conclusion.

identity and self-concept are affected by language and perception (discussed in chapters two and five).

The experience of the women who participated in this project demonstrate that during their time in prison they experienced trauma due to incarceration, but also rich relationships and enduring friendships built over time under hostile conditions. Therefore, this project brings into conversation the lived experience of the research partners with an understanding of trauma in light of the Christian narrative developed by the collective work of pastoral theologians. Each theologian engaged in this project has approached this task differently, but each draws on the experience and images of Christian doctrine, liturgy, or Scripture to locate and re-narrate the experience of the person experiencing resilience after suffering trauma.

This project then turns to the work of D.W. Winnicott, theorists and therapists out of the Stone Center working on Relational Cultural Theory and Therapy, and others whose work is concerned with the ways that we grow and thrive through the foundation of secure relationship.³ These approaches provide ways to think both about the salience of the strong relationships the women formed while incarcerated and also to propose how to build strong relational practices and an orientation toward relational resilience into an intentional Christian community.

In order to live into the transformational intention of the practical theological project that Swinton articulated earlier, I also engage the work of scholars and activists currently working on the phenomenon of mass incarceration in America. These scholar-activists who are concerned with the constitutive elements and the consequences of mass incarceration in the United States provide a context through which to see the deep-seated and multivalent interlocking systems that

³ The Stone Center refers to the Stone Center for Developmental Services and Studies located at the Wellesley Centers for Women. It was founded in 1981 at Wellesley College, and focused on promoting psychological well-being and understanding human development.

lead to disenfranchisement of certain groups in this country and the way in which the prison industrial complex is a central aspect of the creation and maintenance of this social inequity.

When considering the ways in which building relationship and Christian community can impact the experience of reentry into society after decades of incarceration, most often for being sentenced for crimes that involve murder, it is essential to consider the spiritual and psychological effects of rupture and repair. Therefore, the chapter in which the most direct theological reflection occurs is the chapter on the doctrine of the Atonement. Not only is an understanding of the atoning work of Christ central to Christianity, but it also informs most of our understanding of law, justice, forgiveness and redemption. My pastoral counseling clients who were returning citizens and the research partners interviewed specifically for this project discussed these issues, and the development of the intentional Christian community that constitutes the constructive proposal of this project uses a deliberative theology of redemption as a foundational tenet of worship and discipleship.

Intentional Christian Community

When I initially conceived of this project, my hope was to bring to light the stories and experiences of returning citizens. Based on what I had heard and experienced during my residency at The Clinebell Institute, I wanted other people to see what I saw and to hear what I heard from this remarkable group of women. As the planning and my research of this project progressed, I became convinced that Christian community was an excellent context for imagining and proposing ways that existing churches could demonstrate a commitment to promoting the well-being of returning citizens who had been incarcerated for long periods of time. I hoped that I could use my research and analysis to offer suggestions for hospitality and

perhaps transformation in the way these women were perceived, known, and welcomed by, as well as incorporated into, a community that could help them launch the next phase of their lives.

However, after collecting, coding, and analyzing the data and writing about what I learned through the qualitative research aspect of this project, I knew I had to change the focus a bit. I had suspected that I would hear about trauma, about resilience, about the importance of relationship, about the harsh and often unpredictable living conditions—I had heard many iterations of these stories in my pastoral counseling sessions. I thought that the Christian narrative and the telos of Christian hope was an orientation toward which we could develop together something to offer the spirits and psyches of women who had lived under the conditions of incarceration that I had heard about and that I so deeply cared about. I still think this is true, but after transcribing and analyzing the interviews with my research partners, I changed the focus of this project to using the experience of returning citizens with other Christians committed to transformation to start an intentional Christian community that in the course of its worship and discipleship would be committed to the transformation of the social conditions that are involved in mass incarceration in the United States. I learned from my research partners that there was a disconnect between their experience of church, faith and relationship as developed and sustained while incarcerated and their experiences post-incarceration. Through listening deeply and repeatedly to their stories, I became convinced that, in order for returning citizens to use their experience to influence the kind of ministry that I was hoping and imagining could be transformative on both a personal and social level, they would need to be involved with this ministry from the ground up.

With a bit of research, I discovered a structure that could viably support such a proposal. Therefore, in the chapter of this project in which I bring together the previous analysis of my

research and conversation partners, I use the structure of the Presbyterian Church (USA)'s 1001 New Worshipping Communities (whose ambition is to develop new and varied forms of church in light of our diverse and shifting culture) to propose a model of Christian community that could offer a relational and physical space within which personal, social and cultural transformation could happen. As an ordained Minister of Word and Sacrament in the PCUSA, I am particularly interested in the potential that this kind of worshipping community has for the transformation of lives and culture.

Chapter Summaries

In Chapter two, I introduce the qualitative research aspect of this project. In this chapter, I use the words of my research partners to illuminate the themes that were distilled from the words of women who had been sentenced to life and served decades in prison before being released. I discuss the experience of working with women from this group in the context of a two-year pastoral counseling residency, and I offer a thick description of my four research partners' experience of community before, during and after prison. I identify seven themes that emerged out of the lived experience of these women, and I use sections of the interviews to illuminate each theme. The seven themes that I report on in this chapter are: Limited community pre-incarceration, prison as an unpredictable and unreliable holding environment, prison as a relational space, the significance of long-term values, significant differences in the experience of church while in prison and post incarceration, the experience of trauma and the manifestation of PTSD-type symptoms post release, and the significance of identity and post-incarceration transition.

In chapter three, I give an overview of mass incarceration in the United States of America as a cultural phenomenon. An in-depth study of the dynamics at play in the development and function of mass incarceration as it currently functions in North America is far beyond the reach of this project. However, I include a chapter on the significance of the development of this cultural phenomenon in order to locate the work in the wider socio-political context to demonstrate the demand for transformative praxis that is called for in this practical theological project. In this chapter, I pull primarily from the work of Michelle Alexander, Bryan Stevenson and Ava DuVerney to illustrate the ways that these scholars and activists have demonstrated the function of the prison-industrial-complex in the United States of America and how this is used politically to oppress and exploit certain groups of people based on race and economic status and limit their access to power. I will continue to reference and interpret the interviews in later chapters.

In Chapter four, I turn to a discussion of trauma specifically from the work of pastoral and systematic Christian theologians. Given the experience of trauma and PTSD-type symptoms reported from the experience of living as incarcerated people for decades of life, I explore in this chapter the ways in which the experience of trauma and healing can be understood through the context of the Christian faith and incorporated into the Christian narrative of hope, redemption and salvation. This is particularly important to this project as a work of practical theology that strives to locate places of mutual transformation and healing for individuals and community.

In Chapter five, I discuss the work of D.W. Winnicott, Ann Ulanov and theorists from the Stone Center. I bring their work into conversation with the themes that emerged from the stories of the research partner interviews and the pastoral counseling residency in order to explore the

ways in which individuals transitioning out of the prison context can use their experiences to promote health and well-being in their lives and in their communities.

In Chapter six, I explore the doctrine of the atonement with the intention of offering clarity, particularly on the way that, in the United States, mainline Christian protestant denominations' conception of redemption through atonement functions to form the cultural ethos of justice and what it means to live individually and corporately as finite, imperfect people who have been redeemed. Although a thorough exploration of this topic would be a project unto itself, to ignore the significance of this fundamental and highly contested Christian doctrine and the way it functions implicitly in our cultural and spiritual lives would be unfaithful to this project and its goals. Therefore, in this chapter I outline four major forms of the doctrine of the atonement, feminist critiques of the inherited understanding of the salvific work of Christ, and offer possibilities for revised understanding of this key doctrine through the work of process theologians that support the vision of living as redeemed people.

In Chapter seven, I engage the work of pastoral theologian Jan Holton as she has imagined and articulated the resilient community and displaced populations' search for home. Using Holton's work on these topics, I demonstrate how the lived experience (and knowledge gained from that experience) of returning citizens, can contribute to the development of an intentional Christian community that aims to be both a space for healing and transformation. I articulate how the experience of women who are returning citizens following decades of incarceration and intentional Christian communities can use their experience to be mutually transforming.

In Chapter eight, I conclude this work. I draw together the lived experience of the research partners, the conversation partners that illuminate human development and longing, as

well as healing from trauma and displacement from the context of people embedded within the Christian salvific narrative. I rearticulate the intention of this project as a work of practical theology and the hope for this work to be used and developed by others who can expand the parameters of what I have developed here.

Chapter Two

Returning Citizens: Methodology and Thick Description

Introduction

Being in relationship is always a process of interpretation and discovery. Qualitative research on relationship, done with and through practical theological methods, gives the interpretation and discovery in relationship a specific purpose and telos. “Qualitative research...recognizes ‘the world’ as the locus of complex interpretive processes within which human beings struggle to make sense of their experiences. Identifying and developing understandings of these meanings is the primary task of qualitative research.”⁴ Therefore, this study uses a form of data collection and analysis that is both rigorous and conscientious of relationship. The process of data collection, analysis and interpretation is consistent with the values of this project, and so the process supports the content. The research conducted and discussed here aims to understand better the ways in which returning citizens experience relationship and life in community during and post incarceration.

Practical Theology and Qualitative Research

In their work, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, John Swinton and Harriet Mowat aim to give a foundation of the ways in which qualitative research can be used in the service of practical theology so that the integrity of both disciplines remain intact and so that while employing qualitative research practical theological projects remain focused on their

⁴ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, chap 1.

identity and task at hand.⁵ This project is at its heart a practical theological endeavor that utilizes qualitative research methods as a tool of exploration with the telos of transformation. Swinton and Mowat give a succinct definition of the practical theological task when they assert that the primary task of Practical theology is to enable a transformed vision of the situation studied to create changes in the ways that Christians perform our faith.⁶ That is exactly the task of this project. Qualitative methodology is the best fit for this research as this project seeks to describe the lived realities of a certain situation that can then be analyzed and offer explanations and comparisons that can be used elsewhere.⁷ Practical Theology pushes us towards the acknowledgement of the importance of revelation as well as discovery; qualitative research draws our attention to the crucial fact that human experience is inherently interpretative and polyvalent.⁸

Context for Research

The research for this project was done over a number of years. It began rather informally with my two-year residency in Spiritually Integrative Counseling at The Clinebell Institute in Claremont, CA. Clinebell has a partnership with Crossroads, Inc., which is a program that helps women transitioning out of incarceration. The beginning of my residency at Clinebell in 2010 coincided with a shift in the population that Crossroads was serving. For years Crossroads had been providing a program for women transitioning out of prison, but had not had many “lifers”

⁵ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, Conclusion.

⁶ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, Conclusion.

⁷ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, chap. 2.

⁸ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, Conclusion.

come through the program because few lifers were being released from prison. However, during my time at Clinebell, we observed that there was a shift at Crossroads from a program that served few lifers to a program that was serving many lifers and trying to adapt to their needs. My first client at Clinebell was a lifer, and during my residency most of my clients were lifers. It was typical for me to have at least five lifers on my caseload at any time for individual pastoral counseling, and I also co-facilitated the therapeutic group for lifers. Typically, I would begin seeing these women within the three weeks of their release, and our weekly counseling would last for six months. However, some clients who stayed in the area after finishing the program at Crossroads chose to continue counseling, while others did not complete the full Crossroads program and discontinued counseling before the six months was complete.

It was through this process of doing pastoral counseling with women who were just out of prison that I began to hear themes and needs that seemed unique to lifers in transition, but also universal to people who have faced long-term adversity. Something that seemed clear to me was that the psycho-spiritual needs that were expressed during this major life transition could be better met in a community that was intentional about doing so. One can think of these women as people who have been forcibly displaced from their home and culture and relocated into an environment that demands high, and sometimes arbitrary, levels of compliance. After living under conditions of incarceration for decades, they are then released and expected to reintegrate into their previous culture, but over the decades that they were incarcerated that culture has also changed and transitioned in ways they could not anticipate. This is a place that I was able to use the experience I had gained from the years that I saw returning citizens in pastoral counseling to help me to be intentional in constructing my research design. One of the most significant aspects of my research design selection was the use of qualitative research methods that would provide

the opportunity for my research partners to be heard and to discuss the context of their answers to my interview questions. I knew from my experience of spending so much time listening to women from this community in pastoral counseling sessions that giving them the opportunity to be genuine in defining the context of their incarceration and experience was exceptionally important. The power of definition is something that is often denied to those who are members of communities that are marginalized and disenfranchised, and this is even more true for those who are living under conditions of incarceration. Therefore, the overarching method I used for this project was case study.

In her work, *Longing for Home: Forced Displacement and Postures of Hospitality*, pastoral theologian Jan Holton discusses her use of contextual case study. She acknowledges that her use of multiple subjects in her exploration of forced displacement differed from developing a case study of a single person, but that her case study used the same pattern of design. Both Holton and I were listening for the voices of people who had significant experiences of disenfranchisement and lack of access to power, and we both chose case study as the method of research that would best fit this exploration. Holton articulates that case study allowed her the opportunity to bring together the following aspects of research: (1) hearing experiences of vulnerable people told in their own voices, (2) her own experiences and observations collected from working with persons who had experienced forced displacement, and (3) “research and theories of scholars from various theological disciplines and those in the social sciences.”⁹ Although we are studying different populations, some of the significant

⁹ M. Jan Holton, *Longing for Home: Forced Displacement and Postures of Hospitality* (New Haven, Ct.: Yale University Press, 2016), Kindle, Introduction.

elements that drive research design with vulnerable populations apply to both projects, so it is no wonder that I find that my work and rationale mirrors hers.

Research Design, Data Analysis and Reflexivity

The research component of this project does not reflect the most typical case study. However, after careful consideration of the possibilities of case study, and noting the ways in which other scholars (i.e., Jan Holton) find creative ways to use case study in their work, I decided to conceptualize this exploration of how women experience community through their transition out of prison as a case study. In *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Helen Simons' chapter on case study discusses the different ways case study methods are used, and she highlights how we use case study when we want to tell a story of a particular situation.¹⁰ As a research design, case study has the flexibility to be both planned and emergent—and is perhaps most authentic when it is both. Concerning the evolution of case conceptualization throughout the research project Simons writes: “In this sense, the design of case study is emergent, rather than preordinate, shaped and reshaped as understanding of the significance of foreshadowed issues emerges and more are discovered.”¹¹ She also differentiates among three kinds of case study by their function. The case studied here is an instrumental case study, one “in which we choose a case in order to gain insight into a particular issue.”¹²

¹⁰ Helen Simons, “Case Study Research: In Depth Understanding in Context,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Oxford Library of Psychology, ed. Patricia Leavy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 455-469, accessed February 7, 2017, <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=1657789>.

¹¹ Simons, “Case Study Research,” 460.

¹² Simons, “Case Study Research,” 458.

Simons also offers helpful guidance in articulating the qualitative data collection and analysis methods used in case study research. My primary mode of data gathering was semi-structured interviews of four research partners. However, I also used collective experiences reported during my pastoral counseling as well as media produced by or about women who matched my research partners (i.e., books written by or documentaries made about my research partners, a documentary called *Sin by Silence* that interviews women inside California Institution for Women (CIW) where my research partners all served time). This allowed me to triangulate the information I received through my interviews to increase the reliability of the data I was collecting. Simons writes: “The most effective style of interviewing in qualitative case study research to gain in-depth data, document multiple perspectives and experiences and explore contested issues is the unstructured interview, active listening and open questioning are paramount, whatever requisitions or foreshadowed issues have been identified.”¹³ I found this to be true in my own experience and so the interviews that I designed, although semi-structured, incorporated the elements of active listening and open questions. I also explicitly told my research partners that I intentionally wrote the questions as open questions so that they could feel free to answer them in any way they wanted, expanding as much as they liked and also moving into other topics. Three of my four research partners took full advantage of this opportunity.

Simons is particularly helpful in her very intentional articulation of the process of data analysis. Here she makes a distinction between data analysis and data interpretation that was very useful for me in attending to my own process. She writes: “I make a distinction between analysis—a formal inductive process that seeks to explain—and interpretation, a more intuitive process that gains understanding and insight from a holistic grasp of data, although these may

¹³ Simons, “Case Study Research,” 462.

interact and overlap at different stages.”¹⁴ After conducting the interviews, I engaged in both analysis and interpretation of the data that they provided throughout my process of representing my findings in this project. Describing my process of engaging the data I collected as both inductive and intuitive is exactly correct. The reliance on the researcher’s induction and intuition for analysis also speaks to the significance of reflexivity throughout the process. In my data analysis and interpretation, I engaged my transcriptions of the interviews multiple time. I coded the transcripts and paid attention to the parenthetical notes that I had made about the interviews while transcribing (when voices became so soft they were hard to hear while talking about a difficult subject, etc.). This was part of the induction process of creating categories for reporting the findings. However, by the time I created the categories that are presented in this project I knew that these were the result of a very holistic engagement representing the six years of work that I have done with women from this community and that this engagement informed my sense of how to categorize and represent the data that I gathered.

The ability to be critically self-reflective about one’s role in each stage of the research process is imperative to all research, but it is particularly significant to qualitative research. Swinton and Mowat go so far as to say, “we feel that reflexivity is not simply a tool of qualitative research but an integral part of what it actually is.”¹⁵ In contrast to the positivist paradigm of research in which the researcher aims to remain “objective” and distant from the “object” of research so as to not influence or contaminate the research, in qualitative research the researcher is an integral part of the process. Therefore, careful and ongoing analysis of one’s

¹⁴ Simons, “Case Study Research,” 464.

¹⁵ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, chap. 2.

own participation in the meaning-making of the research is essential.¹⁶ Swinton and Mowat identify two elements of reflexivity: personal and epistemological. Personal reflexivity asks the researcher to investigate herself continually in order to discover what personal and political commitments, identities and beliefs shape the research. Epistemological reflexivity urges the researcher to reflect on the assumptions we hold and have made in the construction and course of the research project and think about the ways in which our assumptions have impacted the findings of our research.¹⁷ At each stage of the research process both personal and epistemological reflexivity were woven into the research design and analysis. As no researcher can step completely outside of herself, and reflexivity is more of a learning process than a perfect measure of creating objectivity, one of the most important things that I learned through keeping reflexivity at the heart of this process is the way in which both the project and I were personally transformed by the experience of the research. In some ways, the project and my findings do conform to my strongly held values, and personal and political commitment, but it was the moments of surprise and transformation that lead me to believe that working to embed both personal and epistemological reflexivity at every stage of the process was effective.

All researchers must be reflexive, but feminist researchers engaged in qualitative research methods, which privilege intuitive knowing and perceiving and attending to relational dynamics embedded within the research process, perhaps need to be even more so. There has never been a time during this research process that I was not engaged in reflexivity as this project and my care for these women certainly engaged my own commitments (political and otherwise) and

¹⁶ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, chap. 2.

¹⁷ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, chap. 2.

social/relational location to subject and research partners, but I was most self-conscious of these issues during the stage of data analysis and interpretation.

In her chapter, “Feminist Qualitative Research: Toward Transformation of Science and Society,” Maureen McHugh writes about the significance of reflexivity to feminist research. She proposes that rather than ignoring the significance of unique lived experience, worldviews and human emotions as obstacles in our pursuit of knowledge, we should embrace them and use them to gain insight and understanding.¹⁸ She writes:

The feminist epistemological perspective pays attention to personal experience, position, emotions, and worldview as influencing the conduct of research...In feminist research, there is a realization that such connections cannot be removed, bracketed, or erased, but we do consider it important to reveal them. The researcher is expected to acknowledge her situated perspective, to reflect on and share how her life experiences might have influenced her choice of topics and questions.¹⁹

She suggests that a way for a researcher to engage reflexivity is to create an “intellectual autobiography,” through which the researcher traces her interest in, and relationship to, both her topic of research and her research partners.²⁰ I actually went through this process multiple times at different stages of the research. As I discuss in the following section on snowball sampling, this process was important and complex given the information I hoped to gain and the multiple relationships and subjectivities I had with my research partners.

¹⁸ Maureen C. McHugh, “Feminist Qualitative Research: Toward Transformation of Science and Society,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Oxford Library of Psychology, ed. Patricia Leavy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 145, accessed February 28, 2017, <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=1657789>.

¹⁹ McHugh, “Feminist Qualitative Research,” 145.

²⁰ McHugh, “Feminist Qualitative Research,” 145.

Sampling and Research Partners

This study integrates purposive sampling and snowball sampling. First, in accordance with purposive sampling, I limited consideration of research partners and the counselees whose stories I used for triangulation and analysis in the following way: I worked with women who had been given a life sentence and had been incarcerated for at least fifteen years before they were released from prison. The snowball sampling was purposeful in terms of incorporating my values into the research process and was done in order to gain access to information that was difficult to retrieve through other sampling methods.

Trust was a fundamental issue involved in being able to obtain the kind of information that I needed to hear from my research partners in order to pursue my research interest into relationship and community while under conditions of incarceration and post-release. My experience of doing pastoral counseling with returning citizens--and lifers in particular--taught me that it was essential to establish trust to be able to communicate across the multifaceted cultural differences embedded in any relationship built between women who were returning citizens and myself as a woman who had never experienced incarceration; also I had learned that this trust and ability to communicate differences was something that could only be built over time and through relationship. In order to explore the conditions necessary for building a community that could constructively facilitate transition from incarceration and offer mutual transformation for individuals involved in the community, I would need to ask my research partners to discuss with me the ways in which they felt both successful and unsuccessful at building relationships with others. In order to do this, I needed them to put their experience in context which required them to talk to me about the conditions--often traumatic--in which they built relationships. Finally, in order to give the context to the significance of the ways in which

having an indeterminate life sentence influenced their experience of incarceration, they also had to discuss the crime for which they had been convicted which involved, for some, asking them to revisit the worst moment of their lives.

Often the people in positions of power and influence with whom they had to discuss their crime and experience in the past needed to be convinced by them that they were worthy of being released from prison and not being incarcerated for the rest of their lives. Many of the women that I saw in counseling and that I engaged as research partners for the interviews for this project were accustomed to crafting their story to tell to people in positions of power—specifically the members of the parole board. In acts of self-preservation, they needed to be able to address the preconceived notions they believed (and had experienced) that these people had about them. In order for this research to be successful and productive, trust had to be established, as I was another person in a position of power asking them to give me information about themselves that they would no longer have control over. Therefore, the methods selected for this research project, beginning with the sampling method, first and foremost reflect care and concern for these women and their experiences. They also were selected to optimize the trust that has been built in our relationships to best access the, in a sense difficult to access, information that I needed in order to complete this research. An example of this is my selection of sampling.

I made the choice to use snowball sampling based upon my concern about working with a vulnerable population as well as my commitments to feminist and womanist values and concerns. As discussed more at length in the next chapter, returning citizens on parole and arguably even post-parole are more vulnerable than other adult citizens given that they are subject to the many collateral consequences that apply to people post incarceration. Therefore, in order to choose research partners to interview who would be able to be vulnerable enough to

discuss truthfully the issues of relationship and community that my research necessitated but also had boundaries that I could trust to keep them from making themselves too vulnerable to me, I decided to ask women whom I had seen either for individual or group counseling during my tenure at The Clinebell Institute. Some of the women whom I asked declined to be interviewed because they felt that it was too big a risk for them to take given the inherent vulnerability of being a returning citizen. Other people who were recommended to me whom I did not know, or about whom I was concerned about based on my experience with them in counseling, I also did not interview.

Snowball sampling is an appropriate choice for this research project because of its commitments to feminist and womanist concerns and values. In their article, "Womanism and Snowball Sampling: Engaging Marginalized Populations in Holistic Research," Xeturah M. Woodley and Megan Lockard discuss the importance of attending to the way that research partners are found, contacted and studied particularly for qualitative research which attends to lived experience and contextual meanings.²¹ They write:

We see snowball sampling as a way in which to provide a more comfortable research environment for subjects precisely because it "directly addresses the fears and mistrust ...and increases the likelihood of trusting the researcher by introduction through a trusted social network" (Cohen & Arieli, 2011, p. 423). This social network is essential for womanist researchers in gaining access to their subjects while simultaneously securing their trust.²²

The four women I did interview referred one another to me for interview. Three of the four I had seen for individual pastoral counseling, and the fourth was finishing her time at Crossroads as I

²¹ Xeturah M. Woodley and Lockard M., "Womanism and Snowball Sampling: Engaging Marginalized Populations in Holistic Research," *Qualitative Report* 21, no. 2 (2016): 321.

²² Woodley and Lockard, "Womanism and Snowball Sampling," 327.

began to facilitate the lifers group. Each of these women demonstrated social and psychological competence, and three of them have commitments to transformation of conditions for returning citizens.

Research Partners

I describe in the snowball sampling section of this chapter some of the characteristics I looked for in research partners. Here I want to offer a bit more information about them both as a group and individually. Some of the things that are distinctive about this group of women are their overall high level of education, their ability to be articulate and reflective about their experiences, and their commitment to the transformation of conditions for women who are incarcerated and for returning citizens. Three of the four women represented here have attended graduate school. One attended law school prior to her incarceration, one is currently working on her doctorate degree, and one reported earning a doctorate degree while in prison. What follows is some personal, yet non-identifying, information to help the reader contextualize the words of these women as they appear in the rest of this work.

Laurel

At the time of our interview, Laurel was a 63-year-old woman who identified racially as white and culturally as a “formerly incarcerated woman.” She was incarcerated at age 27 and released from prison at age 57. She was given the sentence of 15 years to life after being found guilty of second degree murder. She was understood to be an accomplice in the death of her daughter, and so she received the same sentence as her co-defendant who committed the murder. She was granted parole 11 times, and appeared before the parole board over 20 times.

Kate

At the time of our interview, Kate was a 69-year-old woman who identified both racially and culturally as Caucasian. She entered prison at age 39, and she was released when she was 56. Kate was released because she was exonerated of the crime for which she was convicted. Kate's case was complicated. She was finally charged and convicted of murder, attempted murder, robbery, burglary, and grand theft auto. However, before she was convicted of these crimes, she had been charged twice with the death penalty. In her own words:

I was originally charged with the death penalty. The case was thrown out after 4 1/2 months because there wasn't any evidence... When I was arrested a year later, and this is something that still gripes me, the district attorney filed the death penalty against me again even though he knew you know this case was bogus. And we were just you know; we picked our lamb and we were headed to the slaughter. But, um, they still charged me with the death penalty. But 8 months later California Supreme Court issued an opinion that took my case from under the death penalty.

She had three co-defendants, but her trial was separated from theirs. She never went before the parole board, because she was not eligible for parole. She says: "My sentence was 32 years to life... on a 25-life if you do 17 2/3 before you become eligible so I had a ways to go."

Rochelle

At the time of our interview, Rochelle was a 51-year-old woman who identified racially and culturally as "African American, black." She was 25-years-old when she was incarcerated, and she was released when she was 47. She was initially charged with first degree felony murder, but that charge was overturned by the court of appeals. The charge for which she was incarcerated was second-degree murder. She received a sentence of 15 years to life for the murder with a two-year gun enhancement for the use of firearms. Rochelle went before the

parole board 8 times, and was granted parole one time. She reports, “I was released to the courts. My parole was defended by Governor Schwarzenegger.”

Greta

At the time of our interview, Greta was a 58-year-old woman who identified both racially and culturally as white. She was 24 years old when she was incarcerated, and 52 when she was released. She was convicted of murder in the second degree, and sentenced to fifteen years to life. She had no co-defendants. She appeared before the parole board 15 times, and was granted parole once. She explains the condition of her release: “I was granted a date, and Governor Schwarzenegger denied it; and I filed a writ in the court and was released.”

Themes

Limited Community Pre-incarceration

The interviews that I conducted confirmed and illuminated further some of the themes that developed during the pastoral counseling that I did at The Clinebell Institute with women lifers paroling from prison. However, there were themes that emerged from these interviews that were unexpected and point toward how the intentional inclusion of reentry ministries can be mutually transforming for both the returning citizens and established Christian community. These themes speak to the ways in which prison actually functioned as a space in which there was time, space and shared adversity that promoted the development of community and the strength of relational bonds. Although this had been intimated prior to these interviews, the interviews developed these themes in unpredicted and exciting ways. One woman who served

about three decades in prison before being released said to me, “Inside all we had was community, out here we have none.” It was this kind of statement that prompted me to take seriously the significance of intentional community as a necessary resource for transition, but what came through these interviews was much more than I could have predicted.

All of the women whom I interviewed struggled a bit to describe the community that they had or were embedded within before they were incarcerated. At best, they struggled to name the communities in which they participated, and at worst they described a kind of isolation and even manipulation of an abusive partner. Kate and Rochelle reported that they had some family, but that it was not necessarily close knit or local. Other community that they reported were facilitated through institutions in which community was more of a byproduct than an intention (i.e., law school, military). Greta reported that her only community was “druggies,” all young people who were living in the mountains and primarily on welfare due to a lack of economic opportunity. Laurel reported that she was involved with a man who was abusive and manipulative, was rejected by a church community with rigid ideas about who could be in community and who could not, and that the result was that her partner killed her two-year-old child. She says these things about the experience of being isolated before incarceration:

I grew up unchurched. When my oldest daughter was a babe in arms I got saved--Assembly of God's church, two months later baptized in the Holy Spirit--all this stuff--but you know after a while those people at the Assembly of God said we just found out the man you're living with, the baby's father, isn't your husband. You can't work in our nursery any more--you're a sinner. And, as a matter of fact, I'm the Associate Pastor's wife and I can't set foot in a sinner's house in order to continue that bible study so I'm not do bible study in your home--you get the trajectory on all of this. Yes, I left him, and I found somebody worse than that and on [date]. I woke him up early and I prayed, God do whatever you have to do to make my life right because everything's wrong. By the end of that day B was dead and C. was taken away, and I had to realize I was with a sociopath and all I had was Proverbs 3:5-6--“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not onto thine own understanding”...And it took me a couple of months to really come out of shock. I was out on bail, he was out on bail--he tried to find me we had been to court [date]...and I had to see an autopsy and realize there were injuries I couldn't

account for-...and he said to me--true sociopath form--I don't need counseling; there is nothing wrong with me; it was just a mistake and, if it's that big a deal to you, we can go kidnap C., go to South America, and I'll even give you another baby. (starts crying) And that's when my world fell apart and I almost ran over him trying to get away from him.

One other thing that you might find particularly as mind blowing as I did--in my early years, I was a co-worker with [name of friend] --she's a dear friend of mine and we would spend long evenings in our job area talking about things, and it was really mind-blowing to both of us to find how many of the same words E. G. and Charlie Manson used on us to manipulate, to control us, to hurt us.

This demonstrates the ways in which even when seeking community prior to incarceration she experienced isolation. She was isolated and ostracized by the church community because of her social position and the church's narrow interpretation of sin. In fact, it sounds like her abandonment by the church led directly to a worsening of her circumstances. One has to wonder if this rejection by the church community left her more vulnerable to manipulation and isolation by an abusive partner. After realizing that there were injuries on her daughter's body that she could not account for, she was able to resist the invitation to follow the man who killed her child into further isolation by moving to another country. It is interesting to note that Laurel includes here a commonality with a woman who is notorious for committing crimes associated with a man who normalized violence and deliberately created a group that stood outside of and was opposed to society. It seemed "mind-blowing" to her that other incarcerated women had similar experiences of relational isolation, manipulation and violence.

Prison as an Unpredictable and Unreliable Holding Environment

A second theme that had a prominent place in each of the interviews that I did was the way that the experience of prison in and of itself was traumatic due primarily to the unpredictability and unreliability of the environment. This theme emerged strongly across clients that I saw for pastoral counseling, and so I was not surprised to see the primacy of this

reported in the experience of the women whom I interviewed. This is the theme that perhaps most strongly links lifers to people who have experienced adversity, particularly perhaps in families, and who had adverse childhood experiences with caregivers who were unpredictable and unreliable. Although I do not want to infantilize in any way the adults who experienced this kind of unpredictable environment, it is important in terms of developing empathy for their experience to note the parallels between people who lack autonomy on many levels and are therefore dependent for their well-being on the reliability of the people with control in their daily environments. The kind of abuse and neglect that these women reported sometimes took the form of institutional neglect, such as lack of reliable medical care, and sometimes took the form of interpersonal interactions with the guards. Interestingly, I heard little about fear of other inmates on this level. There is definitely a power differential at play here, which strengthens the argument that this ought to be considered through the lens of prison as a holding environment in which inmates suffer due to lack of consistent and reliable environment. This subject contributes to and will be taken up further when discussing the reports of trauma as related to the experience Post Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms. Three of the four women interviewed for this project placed significant emphasis on the stress incurred as a result of prison being an unreliable holding environment. One of the contributing factors was staff taking advantage of working with a vulnerable population whose rights had been severely curtailed due to incarceration. Laurel reports her interaction with a sexually predatory chaplain.

[The] current chaplain at CIW is useless--she loves Jesus--I'll give her that much--She loves Jesus, I have no doubt about that--um, but her priority is her home church and we're second best and in...my last thirteen years that she was working at that prison she never once attended a Sunday Service in the psychiatric unit. But she is so much better than the predecessor that was a sexual predator--who preyed particularly on petite blond psychiatric inmates because he had a type and, if he chose the psychiatrics, he could just say who are you going to believe them or me? And I knew, I had reported him for

touching me inappropriately. He and I did not get along well at all--but it took five years for them to catch him in the act with a psychiatric inmate.

Kate describes being sent to administrative segregation (the jail within prison) multiple times without knowing why she was being taken from her cell and brought up for investigation. This statement summarizes well what was expressed throughout her interview:

You have no idea what is going to happen that day--I mean they could pick you up--throw you in Ad Seg--and never let you out. They could throw you against the wall as far as that goes--all of which I have seen happen. You need medical care, you could be killed I was almost killed by Dr. U. His medical mistake—um, it's a very, very insecure world. Because in fact there is a set of rules that you have to follow--if no matter how hard you try they can always find something if they choose to do so. I mean leaving your window open at the wrong time can get you a write up. So there's a constant insecurity and I think it is very much akin to what battered women experience. The level may not be as intense because they are not real likely to punch you in the face--although they have--but you are never completely comfortable. I know before I went to prison I used to sleep like a dog. I didn't sleep well in prison and I have never slept well since because you never know what's coming through that door...But it's not going to be good.

When I went to jail, which I mean, when you get in trouble, you go to jail since you're already in prison--well my roommate and I went to jail. It was 11:30 at night--all of a sudden the door flies open and M., who wasn't a nice woman, told me "stand up and put on your robe and put your hands behind your back. Come here with me." No explanation nothing--but at least I was wearing a red silk robe. She took me up to the Investigator's office and he said, "I know what you've been up to but I'm not talking to you tonight--I am not going to have anything--you are just going to jail," and I said ok--and he was actually startled--I think he thought I was going to [start] crying or spilling my guts or whatever and the guy was startled about the whole thing--but you know he sent me back there and of course the whole prison was just so curious--including the cops and N. was working at--I guess it was the end of his shift--he was the education C.O. but he managed to insert himself into this mess and he told me later he said that, "I just wanted to be sure you got there alive."...There was a lot going on there at that time. The reason they did this, basically they arrested me for being involved with Senate subcommittee investigation. And they were right, I was, and I had actually set up a safety plan so which we had to put into effect and I was out by the next afternoon 'cause the Senator got the Director of Corrections involved and it was a mess. But it was the fact that they came in like that and they also took E, and E was a little old lady with a heart condition who worked for custody; they took her in the infirmary. But so many other lifers said to me, wow, I didn't know that could happen--I didn't know somebody like you could go to Ad Seg. And I thought, and in fact I actually said to one, well you need to wake up and get a grip because it can happen to anybody at any time and it doesn't matter if it's real and it doesn't matter if it's bogus.

Although not exactly the same as what is reported above, for lifers it is also significant that the mindset of the governor and the political temperature at any given time can mean that they are able to leave prison or not. As reported earlier, it was a common experience for these women to go before the parole board multiple times before being released, and at least some of that had to do with whether the governor would sign off on their parole. The reported “seemingly arbitrary” justification given for different governors’ denial of parole further illustrates the way in which the process of incarceration is untrustworthy and unreliable for someone sentenced to life in prison and dependent on others for her release. Laurel uses her own story to demonstrate the process that many, if not most, lifers go through as they hope for parole:

Laurel: One other thing you need to know about my case is that I hold the record for all men and women for the state of California in that in 1988 the governor was given veto power over paroles for lifers. Among other parole hearings--I was *granted* parole eleven times--and had it overturned ten times.

Me: By the governor?

Laurel: By various governors--starting with Pete Wilson--I will not be Willie Horton--and that was an amazing emotional rollercoaster, because it truly takes at least six months to prepare for a board hearing by the time you have your counselor’s report and your psychiatric evaluation and you’ve written everybody you know asking for letters of recommendation saying they have jobs and homes and support for you. You go to the parole board, they say we find you suitable for parole--you are not a danger to society we feel you’ve paid your debt to society. From that day you then wait five months to find out if you are really going to parole or not as a lifer--the first four months its decision review board deciding if any errors have been made. I have one friend--the error was that the tape recorder didn’t work so that set aside that whole finding and she had to start over. The year that Gray Davis took office, I was the first person to go to board right after he was inaugurated, they found me suddenly suitable for parole, that they hadn’t for a while because of the reversal from Pete Wilson. And then Grey Davis came out with this statement that on his watch lifers would only get out of prison in a pine box--and you know suddenly that decision review board realized that they had made a grave error. I had had three men in my life by the time I was twenty-six, and that proves that I have an unstable social history that the board had not considered. So then at the end of that four months, then your paperwork goes to the governor and he has one month to decide whether he is going to fight your release or decline to review--which means he is not changing it and you get to go home--so decline to review is what your hoping for...the last two or three years within three days of me having the letter from the governor stating

I was not going home, I was called into my counselor's office to prepare for my next board hearing--so less than seventy-two hours to cope before you have to go onto the next. ...*That* is stress--that is hard time.

At another point in our interview, she highlights how the level of instability and lack of reliability and consistent standards and judgment affects the way in which lifers must live while incarcerated and the way this process contributes significantly to the way in which prison is an unstable and unpredictable holding environment.

I had a 128A for sitting down during standing count in 1994.²³ In 2009, Arnold Schwarzenegger said the fact that I had had a disciplinary so recently proved that I was a danger to society and that was a reason to overthrow my parole...A short term gets a 128, a bad 128, and they go to jail for it, and they get six months of good time credit taken away and, if they are good for three months, they restore it...and that's it. A lifer gets a 128 and you have to answer to it every time before you go before the parole board, and even when the parole board is laughing about it, the governor can use it fifteen or twenty years later as an excuse to not allow you out of prison. I mean a lifer cannot--I mean the level of stress and how you have to deal--and the infractions can be such small things.

Prison as a Relational Space

In contrast to the very real challenges to the well-being of lifers due to the inconsistency and unpredictability of the institution and those who work for the institution, there emerged an unexpected theme from the interviews that I conducted—that is the significance of prison as a space that promotes the development of community and strength of relational bonds. This was not entirely unpredicted, as I had noted in the counseling that I had done with women from this population through The Clinebell Institute, that there was a contradiction that I wanted to explore further through this project. This contradiction had to do with how many women would report how their survival and potential to be released relied upon not getting into any trouble with anyone, as even the smallest infraction could be used against them at a parole hearing or by the

²³ A 128 is a disciplinary action for an incarcerated person who violates a rule.

governor, as demonstrated in Laurel's account above. Therefore, they focused on taking care of themselves and staying away from people who could get them into trouble by association, often expressing this as "I did me."

But this was contrasted with reports of the significant relationships they had with other women within the prison and how these relationships mattered to them and sustained them. Conducting these interviews helped to clear up this seeming contradiction as the separate themes emerged of prison as an unreliable holding environment institutionally while also being a place where women had the time, space and perhaps inclination to develop strong relational bonds. In response to my question: Can you describe how you found community in prison? Rochelle's answer provides a good summary of what I had gathered from the interviews. She said:

Oh, so many opportunities, at least in California prisons at the time. I went in in the late 80s: inmate activity groups, self-help groups was a way to find community and these were inmate groups that were started by inmates and run by inmates, extension of the institution: various support groups like AA, NA, domestic violence, various cultural groups: African American groups, Mexican American groups, you know so various inmate activity groups was a way that I found community, and belongingness with women in prison was participating and attending...groups. Faith-based groups, I was very active in the church in the prison--in both Catholic and Protestant churches as well as finding community as a tutor for the [community] college program; at one point we were a group of women. So there was multiple opportunities for women to form groups and be part of groups and to find community in ways that people don't think that prison function. And each housing unit also gives you the opportunity to find community based on the folks that live in your hallway or live in your building so community is all around you.

Kate commented on the way in which shared adversity affected the relationships that developed while incarcerated.

I think a friendship in there develops the same as it does anywhere else but it's probably a little more intense and a little quicker. Because when your life is on the line every day--you know you always hear about men who were in the military together and the fox hole mentality and everything--it is exactly the same--exactly the same.

Laurel spoke at length about women's propensity for building community as a significant aspect of prison life. She spoke about women forming families and juxtaposed the experience of men in prison and women in prison to illustrate her meaning.

Me: You were saying there's a depth to the community--particularly the Christian community.

Laurel: So, you start with that women's propensity for community--the fact that when I say women form family--now there is only one or two that I ever allow to call me mom--but you've got all of their--you know I call N. who was my roommate for 13 years, my sister-daughter-friend—ok, she is all of that to me. You don't have the--as many of the--artificial barriers or at least at CIW because of the way it's been made--policies can change whether that is allowed--there's not that depth of community from what I've heard from the women up at Chowchilla because it's not allowed to happen--but if its allowed to happen women will seek it out and make it...and there is something to do with the psychological processes of shared adversity.²⁴

At times, I struggled with what felt to me to be essentialization of her gendered juxtaposition of male verses female incarceration, but then I realized that I had not heard anything from any of my other research partners, or past clients from this population, that disconfirmed what she said. Further, Kate put the gendered argument into a political and institutional context that demonstrates the systems at work in creating gendered differences in community within the incarcerated population. This also speaks to my experience and intuitive sense and conviction for this project that this places women's experiences of incarceration and transition at the center and makes this experience normative in opposition to much of the literature on, and popular portrayal of, incarceration that tends to be male normative.

Me: Do you believe that race and or cultural identity figured into the significant relationships, however you define that, you had?

Kate: No, No

Me: No?

²⁴ Chowchilla refers to Central California Women's Facility (CCWF) located in Chowchilla, CA.

Kate: No, it's not the same--they never segregated the women by race the way they did the men--and when the Department of Corrections started with that segregation thing thirty years ago I don't know exactly what they thought they were doing but they thought it would be safer. What they did is force people basically into a gang--a race gang if nothing else--and now you have all these warring individuals and then one day they got up and they said ok we're not doing that anymore—you're all going to live together. Well that's not going to go as well as it could because you know these people have been enemies for years and now it's my roommate? I don't think so. They had a lot of problems, but I really believe that the gang issues were created by the Department of Corrections and their regulations.

Another salient aspect of community relationships that came up during my research was in response to the questions I asked related to whether race, sexual orientation, etc., had an impact on with whom one developed relationships while in prison. Every one of my research partners reported that it did not. In fact, Kate noted the ways in which developing relationships in prison adds to the diversity in one's life and relationships. I will take this up more and expand on it further under a later theme that came up which was, "long-term values." Time and again, I found that categories that often seem to shape relational patterns through identification on the outside lacked salience on the inside, and what was salient was an identifiable value system. This is explained further in under the theme "long-term values." Here, Kate notes:

Not at all, in fact what I thought was interesting and I always use to think that prison kept me both young and involved in new things because when you are around--people tend to pick their friendships from their own communities like at school or at work or whatever, and those are the people; as they get older, you get older, and you tend to stay within those groups, well prison is just a wild mix. My last roommate was a 23-year-old drug dealer who taught me all the latest dances. But in one sense it is very helpful that way. You know Claremont is a perfect example, you know like slang trees and PhDs--and if you avoid the colleges, you don't get a lot of variety here. And I think that happens throughout the world generally--it's almost like a caste system only it is unintended and it does not operate like that but in prison you have an opportunity to hear a lot more--most of which you didn't want to hear, and see a lot more and interact with people who are 22 years old--so you know how to do that.

There were impediments in prison to building community and relationship. For two of my research partners, having a child murder as a part of their case or a "baby case," was a significant

factor in developing relationships in prison.²⁵ However, the fact that my research partners emphasize the persistence of women making community, families and partnerships within prison despite these very real institutional prohibitions against relationship building demonstrates a desire for, and significance of, having close relational bonds. In answer to my question if there were impediments to building community in prison, I heard the following things:

Kate: There were regulations, and they've made them worse now. Um, like you cannot go to someone's room on another unit. Well, you used to be able to get permission to go--and people would do it. Now you can't even meet in the circle--the circle is just--obviously it's a circle, um, but there are picnic tables out there--you cannot just hang out anymore with people, so you are limited to making friends in your living area and in your work area because they have made it so restrictive. It is lockdown, so much more, so you can't, you don't have the opportunities you did before...What I'm saying is it cuts down on the number of people that you can meet and become friends with. You live in Harrison and it's a strange thing about prison anyhow because I had friends you know that lived in different units and sometimes we wouldn't see each other for weeks and then we would finally manage to get together and it's like, why is this so hard? You know you only live you know what two blocks. Yeah, so even if you had friendships with someone on another block, it's hard to maintain or build on that because you don't know when you are going to get to see them--and it's a lot different now--a lot different--it is much more difficult. It started when they opened it up, another prison for women CCWF--and there was all this yelping about parity.²⁶ And then, all of a sudden, they wanted parity with the men's institutions. A lot of it is political and it comes and goes.

Rochelle: Of course the institution always has a final word, so the impediment there could be seeking approval...that can delay building community, especially when you are trying to create and implement a support group. It takes a long time to get approval to do that--and they have the right to say no--and often times they do say no because that group may not be in the best interest of the institution--it may be that has maybe some type of hidden agendas that again don't mesh with the policies and practices of the Department of Corrections...and then other things usually are just kind of stupid stuff; you don't seek approval when you try to have an unsanctioned group like meeting up under the tree or in

²⁵ Women who have been convicted of child murder often report that they were in fear of victimization from other inmates. Often they do not want to talk about their crime, and so it is challenging for those who seek to be in relationship with them to offer enough supported vulnerability for them to bring this part of their experience into the relationship.

²⁶ Kate is referring to the state opening up a second prison for women, and this sparking conversations about parity of conditions. This led to more focus on parity between prisons with male and female populations.

the backyard or in your room, so there is the institution policy, not just the institution policy but the entire Department of Correction as far as inmates congregating without permission. So even when, you know, the idea of two or three gathered--you know it could go horribly wrong if you have the wrong officer around you at that time. While you know a lot of women like to bible study together, you know it's even hard to do that in your cell or in the backyard because of that suspicious nature that the Department of Corrections seems to have.

Rochelle: There's no LGBTQ organizations in prison. They don't allow same sex relationships--it is forbidden. It is forbidden, and you must be in the closet. If you come out--if you are out, you have some serious problems.

Me: With the department or with other...

Rochelle: With the department. It is a strict violation of rules and you will have some issues.

Laurel: You mean like being a baby killer and put in the psychiatric unit for a while? That was somewhat of an impediment. You mean like having predatory chaplains, rules against hugging--you know all of those kind of things? Trust issues?... Impediments like ok, I'm a victim of childhood sexual abuse--most of us were--something and um statistics on this stuff and 50% report that they are the victim, and that's reported, and I know how many people divulged to me that they have never reported to anybody in their lives--so these--a lot of people have a lot of trust issues.

Long-term Values

During the years that I did pastoral counseling with lifers who had paroled, I heard time and again that women who did not know their out date, and therefore needed to appear before the parole board, did a different kind of time than women who came in for a defined period of time. The impression I was left with, after hearing this theme come up so often in counseling, was that lifers had to be exceptionally careful not to associate with anyone who would get them into trouble because even the smallest infraction could derail or even destroy their chances to parole. This seems to be the case, as evidenced earlier in Laurel's report about her experience with just that dynamic. However, I wanted to explore this further with my research partners so I asked questions about whether or not there was significance to building relationships with lifers over

people with defined sentences. What I heard from my research partners was that when I asked about “lifers” they talked about “long-termers,” and people’s values—people with “long-termer values” was how they determined who they would build relationships with in prison. Greta lived in the honor cottage²⁷ at Chowchilla, and explains her experience of the difference between long-termers and short-termers in the following way:

Greta: I just think that’s how it just worked out, we had more in common; I think lifers do their time differently than short termers... Well, you know you want to get out--so you know--short termers come in, they want to do their little vacation as some call it and they leave. They don’t have to worry about proving to the board that they are never going to commit a crime again. They don’t have to get any type of work skills. They don’t have to work on themselves because they don’t have to go in front of a state psychiatrist to be deemed suitable for parole. They just go--so they were just--most of them were there for vacation--they’d call it a vacation...I had friends of all races--and I had friends with short termers, but I was very selective with whom I associated with.

Kate: Well nothing happens overnight particularly when you're terrified. You know you're too scared to move, but over a period of time you get to know people and usually lifers tend to hang with lifers--and then you have a few people that come in and out that will only hang with lifers when they come in. Most of the lifers have responsible jobs and do get different things, but also these are people that are more likely to come from the same world that you do. In other words they are--a crime spree is not what happened. Usually that is the only conviction that they have--the only crime they have ever committed or not committed as the case may be.

Laurel: When it comes to friendships it was a little bit different. It was some lifers refused to have friendships with short-termers, but it was less about the behavior and more about the I don’t want to get close to somebody who is leaving me again. I was not one of those--I risked as part of ministry and part of discipling to have close relationships who would then leave me sometimes. A short-termer who wants real relationship with a long termer is, if they behave right they are given long-termer status by the other long termers--you know she is an honorary long termer--cause she acts like one--she’s got the values. She realized she made a mistake along the line, she does not want to come back

²⁷ Greta describes the honor cottage as a place where an incarcerated person could live if she didn’t have any write-ups, and was an “upstanding citizen.” She reported that getting into any kind of trouble would lead to being moved out.

to prison, she's willing to pay the price that it takes in personal commitment that it takes in healing and growing.

Me: Can I follow up on that just a little bit, because I've never heard anyone talk about it quite like that? Can you say a little bit about long-term values? You said if she acts like a long termer--so there seems to be a way that long-termers...

Laurel: Um, you take the rules seriously because you know that you really want to get out of here. Here's the big one: when you go into prison and you've got a life sentence you might never get out--so this is life so I have to live it. Short termers--some of them--think they can ignore prison. They can either sleep it away--or they can get--all a lot of what passes for homosexuality in prison has nothing to do with sexuality--it has to do with playing romantic games in order to have a life that distracts you until you get out. That's short-term mentality. Lifer mentality is now this is life--and I am going to live the best life I can, and I am going to prepare to live a better life and one that is redemptive. ...Simply redeeming the time as a biblical concept--the only thing worse than serving time is wasting the time you have to serve...yeah, um that's a long-termer value system.

Significant Differences in the Experience of Church while in Prison and Post-Incarceration

One of the most surprising things that I learned from my research partners through these interviews was how church, and the expectation of what it means to be part of a church community is different inside prison and outside prison. Laurel is working on this topic from an academic standpoint in her dissertation and has therefore reflected a lot on her experience, and she is gathering information through interviews with others as well. She spoke at length and expressively on the subject. It was through listening to my research partners speak about their faith as sustaining and how they experienced church community on the inside that has led me to think of this project more as an opportunity for mutual transformation between women coming out of prison and Christian community rather than Christian community and narrative as a significant resource for the well-being of women transitioning out of prison. Laurel begins by discussing some of the false assumptions people coming into prison to do ministry with inmates make from the start and, by doing so, gives an informative and thoughtful context to the difference between ministry in prison and ministry outside of prison. She also discusses the

assumptions inmates make of what church will mean on the outside based on what they have experienced while incarcerated.

Laurel: I did a paper for the Society of Pentecostal Studies--because I'm a Pentecostal Lutheran--and it's on why Matthew 25:36 is not a sound foundation for prison ministry. That is where Jesus said: I was in prison and you came unto me. 'Cause I'm doing my literature review and everybody's using that, and what I came to realize is first of all who Jesus is talking about is prisoners were not guilty criminals--they were either paupers or they were political prisoners, and therefore what he was saying to give those people is hospitality. And hospitality is good, but if you are going into prison to do prison ministry with the idea of giving hospitality or your church is thinking hospitality--hospitality means you are the other in that household--that's not integrations, that is not healing redemption--where God says you are redeemable no matter what you've done. In prison--on the outside you can have issues with congregations trying to convince them that they are really sinners. You don't have that issue in prison--your issue in prison is convincing us that we are actually redeemable. And so a theology--I give examples of prison theology as challenges to churches to come up with their own contextual prison ministry theologies that depend on the church and the context they are ministering into to look at and if the prison ministry is not grounded on redemption--it's not very useful.

At another point in our interview, Laurel gives an interesting and illuminating articulation to what she is finding is the communication gap between what church means to those experiencing it in prison and those experiencing it on the outside.

This is becoming a salient point in my own Ph.D. research and dissertation research is, one of my questions is: What is the difference between the church on the inside and church on the outside? There is another question that is about what things are more difficult to explain to prison ministry volunteers than to fellow prisoners. And what is coming up, just deeply, is that prison ministry volunteers have no clue about how deep our community is and the Christian community in prison. When I started my Ph.D. work, I was trying to figure out what was wrong with the church in prison, and what I finally came to realize is that the church in prison is so first-century post-denominational post-first-century church and that all the inmates--former inmates are saying, "Oh I miss that church, I miss that church, I miss that community, I miss." My research is based on this phenomena, okay? Of women who find Christ in prison they go out, they come back--they are so happy to come home to church. And trying to figure out what was going on here and I realized, I am looking in my research for the communication gap between outside prison ministry volunteers and the women in prison. And the way I'm explaining it is the prison ministry volunteer comes and said and participates in a church service and says oh this is wonderful, you know what I have a wonderful church too. I have a really good church too, and when you get out you should come to my church. And the prison ministry volunteer's thinking yeah you know once, maybe twice, maybe three times a week, if it's a really amazing church, we have a service where the presence of God is

palpable and we praise and worship together and you should stop by. What the inmate is hearing--you've got a good church like I've got a good church. Oh so church is seven days a week, two or three times a day. I'm always within one-hundred yards of somebody who knows all of my deepest darkest problems, is ready to pray with me about anything, who is going to help me with food, going to help me with meds, going to help me with clothes, going to help me with job, going to help me with interpersonal issues, is going to just all around take care of me because that's how we do each other. And so that short-termers in particular--'cause lifers have to look at the board--the short terms are going ok--so if I spend 24/7 in God's word in bible study I am preparing to parole--'cause the church is going to take care of me 'cause they've got a good church like I've got a good church...and this all has to do with the sense of community--we have an amazing sense of community.

Rochelle: Faith--one of the strongest bonds that you could have with a person I think anyways, especially incarcerated under conditions where you know your faith is what helps you to get through such an oppressive environment, and so to have people around you who believe the same religious principles as you help to keep you strong and very supportive--it's just another support group and yeah so faith was really important.

Greta had reported how important her church community was to her while in prison, so I asked her directly if she was involved in a church community post-incarceration. Her response speaks to the difference that Laurel is exploring and articulating. In response to my question about whether or not she has a church community post-incarceration, she said:

No, not as much--I've been to a few and I'll be honest with you--and this is terrible but I am so tired on the weekends that I just want to stay home, and like I said there were a few that they had cliques within the church. Which every church does, don't get me wrong--there's every church that has cliques. They would greet you but then it just didn't really feel like I was a part of, and I was used to being part of inside, and I think it's a different part of inside than it is outside...Out here people have resources--this is what I thought about. In there you don't have resources you have each other--period. You can't go to the store, you can't call a lawyer, you can't if you have a problem--so you rely on each other more than people do out here. People don't have that support of each other--they do while they're in the church and I'm sure they do on certain levels but it's not the same.

The Experience of Trauma, and the Manifestation of PTSD-type symptoms Post Release

It was clear to me, in working with women from this population over a period of years in pastoral counseling, that the experience of long term incarceration was traumatizing in the sense

that some of the experiences they had in that environment overwhelmed their ability to cope, and therefore they report experiencing ongoing post-traumatic stress symptoms (eg. hypervigilance, hyperarousal, flashback, etc.). As was mentioned in earlier sections, many women enter prison having experienced trauma from abusive interpersonal relationships (i.e., childhood sexual abuse, domestic violence, etc.); further, the adverse experience of living under conditions of an often unreliable and insecure environment is in itself traumatic. Although it was beyond the scope of this project to explore the particulars of how trauma was experienced and how it has a lasting impact on the experience of the women who are living post-incarceration, it is clearly a significant issue that came up both in counseling and with these research partners who spoke on this without any of my initial questions being about trauma or Post-Traumatic-Stress-Disorder. Because of the content of the interviews, when salient, I did ask follow-up questions specifically about the trauma that was being reported—but this was a response to the content being disclosed and not an original part of my research design. Therefore, I have given this a category of its own and will integrate this with pastoral and systematic theologians understanding of trauma and resilience later in this project in relation to transforming praxis of intentional Christian community given the reported experience of women in this population.

Laurel: I am in therapy...I have post--I have horrendous Post-Traumatic-Stress-Disorder issues--I just do.

Me: Of course, it would be hard to imagine how anyone who would come through this kind of experience that you are describing and not have...

Laurel: Right--I mean you cannot--thirty years of stress and trauma and pain does not go away. There are some things are very, very good. You think this office is small--I think it is so spacious compared to a prison cell. It is the size of two of them, and there is only one person assigned to it—wow. And then there are things, that um, I was at work one day when I was working at [community college] as a tutor, and I had been in the library--and I was doing a project for the [community college] CIW program--CIW was on my mind. And I go to walk out of the library and there's this hall and there was this woman--young woman--sitting on the floor reading a book--and that was the end of the world--

because I thought I had just missed the yard down... You can move around where you're at, but if you walk out into that hall and the yard had gone down and you didn't know it, you were subject to being thrown to the ground, having a disciplinary action, all sorts of things. Because when there is an incident going down--and so I mean the pit of my stomach fell, my knees went weak, I almost ended up on the ground, and I had all that adrenalin rush. And it took me a couple of days for me to get over, and it took me a couple of days to get over the adrenaline rush of that... But, I mean, just classic PTSD, inappropriate response to a stimuli that was just so close to the stimuli that it triggers what used to be the appropriate response.

And this unscripted interchange between Kate and me during her interview demonstrates well the multileveled spheres of trauma before, during and after incarceration.

Kate: Every exoneree needs to be dragged to their therapist and left there immediately... I remember N. N. telling me, you know you have Post Traumatic--or as they were calling it Post-Incarceration-Syndrome. And I said not--and she said no, you do; you should probably go see a therapist. So I said, I'm fine, I'm fine. She said, "How easily do you startle?" Well, the dog came up behind me, and the dog ended up sliding down the wall across the room. "How do you sleep?" I don't sleep--you know, but you don't recognize that.

Me: Right you lived with it...

Kate: And well, the thing is when you are an exoneree, we are driven by different things. If you are one of the people that thinks you have to do something about it--you are driven to do it, and also you are so grateful to be alive--but then people expect you to be grateful, and it goes around and around in circles. But it is a lot different because we all get the media attention, we do all different things and so the difficulties that you run into having gone through this mess show up later and then you have no idea what to do. 'Cause I sure didn't--I mean, I remember I immediately went to work on trying to get N. T. out, and I was actually part of her legal team, and I got to go into the federal prison to interview her--that was bizarre--that was bizarre--but I remember and then we got her out--and it was a huge, huge press event. We actually appeared on the California page of the LA Times--and we went to a dinner that night, and the whole bit--and it was fabulous. And the next day I was suicidal--I was so depressed I thought I was going to die--or maybe I should die--that's probably not normal. But it is, I believe, a standard part of PTSD that your emotions aren't normal.

Me: Well, and the hypervigilance you discussed earlier about having to have in prison--you don't just shut that off either.

Kate: No, it takes a while--ask the dog. Poor dog. But she was a puppy and she came up and she kind of bit me in the calf. We had--there were no doors between the living room and the kitchen and she ended up sliding down the wall over there somewhere--never did that again--but I mean it happened without thinking. You don't walk up behind someone

like that--and I've made that mistake myself with somebody who just got out of prison. Or I would do it in prison, not thinking because I wasn't a battered woman, you know I'd walk and touch somebody on the shoulder and they'd go nine feet in the air--didn't expect it. You know--that's your hypervigilance.

Me: A lot of trauma

Kate: Ah, unbelievable and then the people who had so much trauma when they came in--I mean we don't need prisons--we need traumatic care units.

Me: Is there any care inside prison focused on trauma and resilience and post-traumatic growth and that kind of thing?

Kate: No

Me: That's amazing--it seems like such a no-brainer that that should be part of it. You don't seem to get through prison without trauma and most people come in with some sort of trauma at least through a trial even well, how would there not be any kind of care for that?

Kate: It's a no brainer--you should educate them, make them program, give them a care manager to figure out what is really going on and then give them treatment for that appropriate thing. I mean there was a woman she was in there on whatever, and her husband told her that he was going to kill her in the parking lot as soon as she got out. Well, he wasn't going to kill her in the parking lot, honey--I just called the watch commander--got the surprise of his life. But if she had decent ACSE management, someone to direct, to get her into CWAA, to get her into therapy for domestic violence or whatever else was going on. Prison in some ways could be an invaluable space if we did it right. I mean leaving aside the trauma of just getting through prison--and obviously you wouldn't be so traumatized if they treated you differently but it--there is so much that we could do--I mean they're there anyhow--you know?

Me: Captive audience, really

Kate: You are going to go to the damn class. And not everybody's going to cooperate and that's fine—we'll just lock you in your room--but yeah, it could be a wonderful tool in helping people change their lives. Not everybody's ready, but you could knock the prison population in half if you did that. I mean I remember W., when she went to prison, she finally figured out she was a battered woman--she fought back so she didn't think she was a battered woman. M T still talks about the fact that I am the first person who ever said the words to her, you are a battered woman. And she just kind of went, wow really?

Me: So prison could be a place of healing?

Kate: It could be tremendous; it could be tremendous.

Significance of Identity and Post-Incarceration Transition

The issue of identity and self-concept were a very important aspect of exploration and insight development that I did with women in this population in pastoral counseling at The Clinebell Institute. Perhaps, predictably, during the time of this major life transition after being incarcerated for decades, there was a need for many women to reflect on their identity and redefine who they believed themselves to be outside of the institution. I clearly recall one woman who had been incarcerated since the 1970s being concerned that she had become “institutionalized” and perhaps could not function adequately on the outside. One very common theme that came out in counseling is the belief that everyone could tell that they were an ex-felon and surprise that people on the street did not seem to know. Another common theme was a struggle with feeling manipulative if they tried to negotiate their environment to get their needs met. Through listening to many clients talk about this struggle, I came to learn that there were certain words that were used in the institution by the authorities to define “inmate behavior.” Examples of these kinds of words were antisocial and manipulative. With my counseling clients, I had to do a fair amount of psychoeducation around these terms to release some of the power and stigma associated with them and internalized by my clients. Therefore, although it was not in my research design to ask specifically about the significance of self-concept and the influence of external factors and relationships on identity, I was not surprised when my research partners brought this up in different contexts. Laurel speaks about the significance to her identity and sense of what she was in prison for when the board found her eligible for parole—long before she actually was released. She says:

I had already been found suitable for parole, so those powerful, fat, white guys on the board had already said that I was forgivable by the state--that does something on the

inside too to help you carry on. It, something clicks in there--I mean I still fight with myself as to whether what I did and didn't do was forgivable, but it's like from that moment on, you know you are a political prisoner and you are not--it takes some of the shame and self-recrimination and doubt away.

Rochelle discusses the importance of language and words used to self-identify as someone who is living post-incarceration. She says:

A person needs to be willing to connect with people sometimes...you just need to have the willingness to connect and be part of community--and I think returning citizens are afraid. You know--especially those who were a really long time in prison, you have this impression of yourself like people know that you have a big O on your forehead that says offender--or a C, convict--and they don't--but you're so self-conscious of that, and the institution makes you so self-conscious of that, you feel like an alien when you come out. And you're disenfranchised--you know you've got the felony status and people are telling you that you know you're not going to be able to do this, and you're not going to be able to do that, so all those disenfranchisements just makes you feel, you know—different. So it's that difference that you feel that becomes your impediment and your downfall. And a great representation of that is the Shawshank Redemption--you know it shows that how difficult it can be for a person to transition from having a life sentence in prison based on stigma and stereotypes and mistaken beliefs that you have about yourself. And it's not true--no one can identify you--you carry that baggage from being institutionalized and buying into that and it's just not true, it's just not. And those who buy into it take longer to transition, are not as successful to those who think differently about themselves. So the language has to change, and so I like to use, you know, instead of ex-felon and ex-offender, its returning citizen is the new lingo and once we get used to using that and identifying with that, people will feel more like a citizen. And when you feel like a citizen, then you have rights and privileges of that citizenship. And when you say felon and offender, you have no rights and privileges so, um, I'll get on a soap box, so let me just stop...and so, yeah--I know that people will transition faster, be more successful and recidivism will be reduced to very small amounts once we restore the dignity to those who are incarcerated and those who are incarcerated and returning to their communities reclaim that dignity you know through citizenship--so yeah

Research partners also consistently discussed the significance of continuity in relationships during and post incarceration. Most also talked about the importance of people from the outside reaching into people in prison with information and relationships to help with the transition. In response to the most open-ended and last structured question in my interview, “Is there anything else you want to tell me?” Rochelle talked again about the significance of identity, knowledge, and continuity to the transition and life post-incarceration. She says:

Well, you know there's a lot--well there's one organization called, and I'm not putting a plug in for them but they're doing great work, Just Leadership USA. It's all about the formerly incarcerated or returning citizen and they're building a coalition. You know and we need to know about the groups that are on the outside fighting for the rights of those inside; you know it's such a gap in information--a huge void of information--that we are not privileged to when we are on the inside. So you can feel abandoned, you feel alone, you feel like you know all these things are against you when there's a lot going on outside and, if we knew the work and the policies that were going on outside, we would be, you know, chomping at the spit to get out--and resisting institutionalization you know. But we don't know, and therefore we give in to this tyrannical system that ends up conditioning us into becoming felons and that's a sad thing so--alright! Is there anything else?

All of the research partners who went through the Crossroads program during their transition talked about it being helpful to their transition. Some commented on the significance of being able to be with other women they had known for years while incarcerated because they came through a transition program. Every research partner reported that many, if not most, of the friends and relationships they have now began during their time of incarceration. Greta also discussed the relational limits that she experienced going through the Crossroads transitional program. She says:

When you're introduced with Crossroads, everybody knows where you've come from, and so that limits a lot of people that don't want to get involved in something like that. Whether it's because they don't understand--I was at the Concerts in the Park, I was talking to a gentleman, they had a car they were raffling off, and I was talking to him and the conversation was going really good and all of a sudden one of the girls came up and said, oh yeah--and we're from Crossroads--and the whole conversation just kind of--he wasn't comfortable or I don't know what it was. So all of the, everything that was related to Crossroads were you were coming out of prison, and it wasn't, oh, this is Greta, and on a different--you were stuck in this one little category when you met people--so I think that limited.

Continuing to be associated with prison and being under correctional control (i.e. parole) were the major impediments that research partners reported to building community upon their release from prison. Laurel discusses her compromised opportunities to meet with her daughter and grandchild, due to the stipulation of her parole that she not have direct contact with minors while

on parole, as issues that interfered with rebuilding relationship with her surviving daughter. In reporting impediments to maintaining or creating community following her release, she said:

Parole--hugely parole. Depending on when I lived in Claremont...because I was a child related case, I was not allowed direct contact with children under 18 until I was discharged--well not for the first three years, then I got permission to start having relationship with my granddaughter. Part of the reason I have such a distant relationship with my daughter is that she was so thrilled at me getting out, she came-- drove down here the day I paroled and my two-year-old granddaughter. My daughter brought one of her high school students with her to help entertain the baby on the way. Thank God because I was not allowed to be in the same room. If I did, if I was fill in pastor, you know I was preaching at my church, I had to have K. do the children's sermon...K and I tried to do a combined Thanksgiving and realized, oh no, somebody wanted to bring their children. I couldn't go...and I couldn't go to [hometown] to see my parents, and my dad couldn't come down here, so my dad was not able to attend my wedding because he couldn't travel and I wasn't allowed to. Those things are those things are harsh. And now I'm beyond all of that and now I've got a passport!

Kate discussed some post-incarceration issues that were consistent with other research partner reports, and others that were particularly salient to exonerees.

Kate: It is different for everybody. Some people never want to think about this again. You know they--especially exonerees, they know they were lucky to escape with their lives. Probably two-thirds of them disappear after a year or two into the woodwork... but there are about one third of us that are running around trying to change the world.

Me: It sounds like there are with the exonerees kind of two extremes.

Kate: Yeah, it is with the exonerees.

Summary

As a practical theological endeavor, this chapter provides a thick description of the experience of four women who served life sentences in California penitentiaries after being convicted of the crime of murder. The focus of these interviews was to find out more about their experience of community before, during and after incarceration. Through implementing qualitative research methods, these seven themes emerged related to research partners' experience of community before, during and after incarceration: Limited community pre-

incarceration, prison as an unpredictable and unreliable holding environment, prison as a relational space, the significance of long-term values, significant differences in the experience of church while in prison and post incarceration, the experience of trauma and the manifestation of PTSD-type symptoms post release, and the significance of identity and post-incarceration transition. In the next chapter, I will offer cultural context concerning what it means to be incarcerated during an age of mass incarceration in the United States. Following that, I will use the above description of current experience to engage selected pastoral theoretical work to explore the ways in which the Christian community and narrative is uniquely positioned to provide the kind of intentional community that can meet the needs expressed through the experience of these research partners.

Chapter Three

Contextualizing Reentry: Mass Incarceration in the United States

Introduction

The phenomenon of mass incarceration in the United States in the year 2017 is a complex issue that many scholars and activists have engaged—most often from a legal perspective, but most interestingly recently from a human-rights perspective. It is far beyond the scope of this project to examine this phenomenon, its incarnation, development and implications in depth. And yet, it is also impossible for this project not to address this issue precisely because it is a practical theological endeavor with the goal of transformation at its heart and based on the experience of people who have lived as incarcerated human beings for decades in the American prison system during this time of mass incarceration. What I have not found in my research is someone who is engaging the multivalent issues engaged by the phenomenon of mass incarceration from a faith perspective with the goal of the transforming systems feeding this phenomenon through partnering in community with returning citizens.

Therefore, in this chapter, I hope to set a context within which to explore the salience of transformation through the re-entry process, and also to lay a foundation for exploring why incarceration and reentry are both theological human-rights issues that are ripe for exploration using practical theological methodology as a tool for reflection, analysis and transformed praxis. In order to manage this topic in a way that is respectful to the phenomenon itself but can be limited to one chapter in this project, I am going to use the work of Michelle Alexander in *The New Jim Crow*, Bryan Stevens in *Just Mercy*, and the words of both of these authors among others that appear in the 2016 documentary *13th*.

I am going to begin by reviewing some of the main concepts presented in this documentary because it provides a platform for a concise look at the prison-industrial complex in the United States and provides insight into how politics, economic production, and racism in the American context come together over time to form the phenomenon of mass incarceration. Since my focus in this project is upon re-entry and how intentional Christian communities can work against the narrative internalized by citizens and returning citizens alike concerning what it means to have been incarcerated, when I turn to the work of Alexander and Stevens, I will be focusing on the implications of their work for those who are re-entering society post-incarceration.

13th²⁸

The documentary 13th takes its name from the thirteenth amendment of the Constitution of the United States which formally abolished slavery in the United States, but which left open the provision that people convicted of criminal acts do not hold the same rights as other human beings.²⁹ The documentary opens with the statement that the United States—often referred to as the land of the free—is home to only five percent of the world’s population, but twenty-five percent of the world’s prisoners. The film explores how the way in which the Thirteenth

²⁸ *13th*, directed by Ava DuVernay (Sherman Oaks: Kandoo Films, 2016) accessed January 23, 2017, <https://www.netflix.com>.

²⁹ “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.” US Constitution, amendment 13, sec. 1.

Amendment to the Constitution is written leaves open, for anyone who wants to exploit it, opportunity for enslavement of human beings once they have been criminalized.

Systematic Criminalization of Black People in the United States: The Development of the Mythology of Black Criminology

When slavery was abolished, the South was left with an economic system that was not viable without forced unpaid labor. One solution to this was to use the provision in the wording of the constitutional amendment ending slavery: arrest and convict people for minor crimes thereby making them into criminals who would then become a new source of unpaid manual labor. It was following the abolition of slavery that there was the first prison boom in America. African American people were arrested for minor crimes such as loitering or vagrancy and when they became criminals were then put to work to rebuild the southern economy. This “solution,” led to the development of a national mythology of black criminality.

Following reconstruction and lasting into the mid-1960s civil rights movement, the legalization of segregation and relegation of African American people to lower status than white people enforced in the southern and border states by Jim Crow laws also exploited the mythology of black criminality. When the civil rights movement was portrayed in the media, the protestors were shown as violent offenders breaking the laws of segregation. John Hagan, Professor of Sociology and Law at Northwestern University, discusses the unfortunate confluence of the rising national crime rate (attributable to the demographic shift of coming of age of the baby boomer population) and the civil rights movement. This confluence and conflation gave President Richard Nixon and those who would follow him a platform to continue to associate black skin with criminal behavior. The implication became that, if black people were

granted equal rights, the country would experience higher crime rates. One of the things that the film does so well is to demonstrate how politicians, both Republicans and Democrats, create, color, use and exploit the fear of the American people to justify the incarceration of so many poor people and people of color.

Tough on Crime—From the War on Drugs to Legislation of Mandatory Minimums

The film 13th also explores how, in the Nixon era, the war on race morphs into the war on crime with all of the civil rights movements of the time portrayed as threats to law and order. Nixon Domestic Affairs Advisor, John Ehrlichman, speaks to the way in which the Nixon White House exploited people's fears and used the proposed war on drugs to oppose groups that posed a threat to white power and privilege. Ehrlichman, says:

The Nixon campaign in 1968, and the Nixon White House after that, had two enemies: the antiwar left and black people. You understand what I'm saying? We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did."³⁰

For Nixon, the war on drugs was theoretical and used as propaganda. It was actually the election and presidency of Ronald Reagan in the 1980s that made the war on drugs a reality in this country. The Reagan White House, announced a war on drugs in 1982—at a time when polls demonstrated that the issue of drugs was not a major concern to most people living in the United States. In effect, Reagan was determined to make drugs an issue for the nation at a time of severe economic crisis. Then, with the advent of crack cocaine and mandatory minimum

³⁰ Dan Baum, "Legalize it All: How to Win the War on Drugs," *Harper's Magazine*, April 2017, accessed January 9, 2017, <http://harpers.org/archive/2016/04/legalize-it-all/>.

sentencing, the war on drugs was again heavily racialized. The way that the mandatory minimum laws were written was unfairly punitive to the economically disadvantaged. An example of this is the way in which the punishment was different for possession of crack cocaine (associated with economically disadvantaged communities) and powder cocaine (which was associated with economically advantaged, often white communities). Congress established much harsher mandatory sentences for crack than for powder cocaine. The punishment for one ounce of crack cocaine was the same amount of time in prison as for 100 ounces of powdered cocaine. Angela Davis is quoted in the film as saying, “The war on drugs was a war on the community of color.”³¹

President Bill Clinton is also critiqued for his role in the implementation of The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act which implemented things including “three strikes,” mandatory life sentences, 9.7 billion dollars in funding for prisons, 6.1 billion dollars in prevention programs, money to hire 100,000 new police officers, and a significant expansion of death-penalty eligible offences.³² Some argue that it was during the Clinton era that the militarization of police forces and the current configuration of mass incarceration took form. Bryan Stevenson says in this film, “There’s really no understanding of our American political culture without race at the center of it.”³³

Politics, power, racism and economic exploitation have been intertwined and had a symbiotic relationship in the creation of mass incarceration in America since its inception.

³¹ 13th.

³² Jessica Lussenhop, “Clinton Crime Bill: Why is it so Controversial?” *BBC News* BBC News, April 18, 2016, accessed December 13, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-36020717>.

³³ 13th.

Nothing may demonstrate this more clearly than the understanding of the existence and function of the American Legislative Exchange Council or ALEC. The documentary 13th demonstrates the ways in which ALEC, a private club formed in 1973 of which politicians and corporations are members jointly form, propose and submit legislation that serve the economic interests of the member corporations. Some of the past and present corporate members of ALEC are Wal Mart (largest seller of long guns in the United States), Correction Corporation of America, and America Bail Coalition. Perhaps the most infamous ALEC-backed law is the “stand your ground law” that allowed George Zimmerman to kill the unarmed, black teenager Trayvon Martin in the state of Florida without being found guilty of a crime in a court of law.

The Prison-Industrial Complex

When most people think about incarceration for economic gain, we think about private prison corporations. Private prison corporations, such as Corrections Corporations of America (CCA), make contracts with states. As Bryan Stevenson notes in 13th, states are required to keep these prisons filled even if nobody is committing crimes. He comments on how, in the 1980s and early 1990s, these private prison corporations became a growth industry unlike other growth industries in American history—it was a model guaranteed to succeed.³⁴ However, the prison-industrial complex in this country and the exploitation of incarcerated people goes much further than for-profit prisons. It involves the very long contracts made with vendors for the prisons providing no motivation for the delivery of a quality product. It includes corporations that have contracts with prisons and use incarcerated people as an extremely cheap labor force. American corporations are benefitting monetarily from the system of mass incarceration and punishment of

³⁴ 13th.

Americans who are overwhelmingly poor and people of color. This exploitation and the financial interest it supports has strong parallels to the post-slavery era of freed slaves who were arrested and criminalized in order to provide the labor necessary to support the economy.

However, the end of the era of mass incarceration may be upon us as the economic and political viability of sustaining a nation with so many of its adults incarcerated is demonstrating signs of weakness. We have too many laws that are locking too many people up for too long a time. Some theorists following this trend believe that the next iteration of mass incarceration will be community control.³⁵ Instead of locking millions of people in cages, people will be monitored and surveilled in their own communities.

This is where my research becomes particularly salient. I am looking at the process of reentry, and my research partners as well as my clients at The Clinebell Institute who were returning citizens overwhelmingly struggled with the collateral consequences of having been incarcerated. In the next section, we will engage the work of Michelle Alexander as she discusses the problem of the “label” of prison. In fact, this is what we will be engaging throughout the rest of this project through a theological lens as the collateral consequences experienced by, and community surveillance of, returning citizens engage the theological issue of what it means to live as a redeemed person as well as the ways in which mainstream Christian conceptions of atonement and salvation shape our cultural ethos and thereby acceptance or resistance of the ways in which returning citizens are treated. There are currently over 40,000 collateral consequences for people who come through our criminal system.³⁶ These include, but are clearly not limited to, access to student loans, acquisition of food stamps, ability to find

³⁵ 13th.

³⁶ 13th.

employment due to the questions on job application questions about criminal history, loss of the right to vote, etc.

Bryan Stevenson states (in many formats and in many places) the simple fact that I also noticed in my counseling work with women. When people are involved with the criminal justice system in this country, and particularly if they have been incarcerated, we tell them repeatedly that they *are* the worst thing that they have ever done. We define people by their behavior. I cannot tell you how many counseling sessions I have had with returning citizens in which I remind them that none of us (myself included) want to be defined by the worst thing that we have ever done, and that most people do not carry that burden. I work to help them lay that burden down as I have observed the huge toll it takes on one's spirit and psyche. It is recognizing and wanting to help women who were struggling with this that initially spurred my interest in doing this work.

However, as long as returning citizens and others under correctional control have to confront their status (and therefore identity) as offenders we, as a culture, are creating, maintaining and sustaining a class system through which there are mechanisms to ensure those who are disenfranchised remain in that state. This is discussed further in the section on collateral consequences, but one example of this is the reality that in most states in this country people who have been incarcerated must indicate this status on any employment application. This limits their ability to find work and achieve relative economic security, and maintains their identification as persons who have been convicted of a crime. The focus of this question on employment applications is not to reflect their payment of debt to society, but rather the violation that led to their incarceration.

This is directly against the work, life and teachings of Jesus, and therefore engaging this topic through the discipline of practical theology is an essential step toward doing the work toward transforming this system of oppression.

Although I do not directly address the racialization of this form of oppression in the next chapters of this project because that is beyond the scope of this dissertation, it is essential to note that this is always a highly significant factor when we are discussing the way in which incarceration, correctional control, and collateral consequences maintain the disenfranchisement of the poor and people of color in this country. Both Bryan Stevenson and Michelle Alexander speak to this time and again. In 13th, Bryan Stevenson notes that 30% of the black men in Alabama today have permanently lost the right to vote as a result of a criminal conviction.

³⁷Michelle Alexander demonstrates that so many of the aspects of the old Jim Crow laws are now legal again once you've been branded a felon—and that in American we have not ended our racial past; instead we have redesigned it.³⁸ In the next two sections I will look at the work of these two scholars as their work speaks to the experience of women in prison and the challenges particular to the re-entry process for returning citizens. The film 13th ends with words that actually epitomize the motivation that I have for doing this project and the transformation that I hope will be a product of this project: “The opposite of criminalization is humanization, that’s the one thing that I hope people will understand.”³⁹

³⁷ 13th.

³⁸ 13th.

³⁹ 13th.

The Prison Label

Although I explore the ways in which women experience community while incarcerated and the consequences of their experience of decades of living as an incarcerated human being, at its heart, this project is about the future--about reentry and possibilities for transformation. I propose that a way to increase the possibility for this transformation is to develop intentional Christian community that is focused on providing a kind of holding environment that understands trauma, fosters resilience and is faithful to the commitment of Jesus to value and improve the lives of those who are chronically and historically disenfranchised. Before we can understand the salience of developing this kind of space in community, we need to really understand that the heart of the problem with mass incarceration (or mass communal surveillance and correctional control) is not the incarceration itself but the significance of carrying the label of prison for the rest of one's life. Michelle Alexander addresses this at length in her book, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. She posits, and I agree, that people are mistaken if they think that the way to undo mass incarceration's function as a system of control would be to reduce the harsh sentencing that led to the exponential jump in the prison population from 350,000 to 2.3 million in a short period of time.⁴⁰ The reason this is mistaken, Alexander argues is that "This system depends on the prison label, not prison time." She writes:

Once a person is labeled a felon, he or she is ushered into a parallel universe in which discrimination, stigma, and exclusion are perfectly legal, and privileges of citizenship such as voting and jury service are off-limits. It does not matter whether you have actually spent time in prison; your second-class citizenship begins the moment you are branded a felon. Most people branded felons, in fact, are not sentenced to prison. As of 2008, there were approximately 2.3 million people in prisons and jails, and a staggering 5.1 million people under "community correctional supervision"— i.e., on probation or

⁴⁰ Michelle Alexander. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. rev. ed. (New York: The New Press, 2012), Kindle, chap. 2.

parole...It is the badge of inferiority—the felony record—that relegates people for their entire lives, to second-class status.⁴¹

The reality that this relegation to second-class status keeps people disenfranchised is clearly an issue in terms of providing for basic needs of daily life, such as having enough to eat, finding employment to support self and family, etc. I don't want to minimize those needs or claim that they are not significant. The need for the many agencies and people dedicated to meeting these needs of returning citizens and their families is huge. The focus of this particular project is finding ways to counteract the ways in which these realities become internalized and through this internalization do violence to the well-being of the returning citizen. I recognize that all of these things are intertwined, and it takes people who are ready and willing to intervene on all levels from legal, to medical, to community support, to ecclesiastical in order to support the well-being of those whom historical and generational systems of oppression are designed to keep marginalized. Without minimizing the significance of any other effort being done in other fields, I am hoping to explore and demonstrate the unique contribution of intentional Christian community to providing for the needs that are generated by the prison label through the phenomenon of mass incarceration.

Alexander continues her consideration of the function of the label of prison as she demonstrates the closed circuit of recidivism when people are placed under community correctional control. She highlights something that I also found and discussed in chapter two concerning my consideration of whom I could and should responsibly interview for this project: being on parole increases your vulnerability to the state, to the system of correctional control, and therefore poses a risk to your freedom. On its most basic level, if you can be stopped and

⁴¹ Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, chap. 2.

searched without your consent and are being monitored and surveilled by the police on a regular basis, you are at higher risk of being returned to conditions of incarceration. Alexander uses the words of Loïc Wacquant to describe this situation of being kept at a higher risk of incarceration because one has the prison label as the “closed circuit of perpetual marginality.”⁴²

I know from my own research and sitting in the room with women as they discuss the end of their parole, that there is a feeling of relief and release that they consistently radiate that is hard to put into words, but they seem to feel as if they are *finally* free. I have seen versions of the same embodied relief as I have sat with different women who discussed being off parole. Their eyes light up, they breathe deeply, and they smile. It makes sense that, after spending decades incarcerated and being surveilled and controlled as an inmate, the continuation of community correctional control is a burden and a limitation on the returning citizen’s sense of self. Laurel discussed this in her interview. She said:

I served 30 years at the California Institution for Women, and was paroled on [date]. So it’s now been six years. After four years, I was able to totally discharge off parole. I have a passport; I am a free human being. I just can't own a gun, and who wants to anyway?

Just Mercy and Collateral Particular Consequences for Women

Bryan Stevenson, executive director of the Equal Justice Initiative, is a social-justice activist, lawyer, professor and author of the book *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption*. In this book Stevenson discusses his work in a way that sounds theological to those with ears to hear when he writes:

This book is about getting closer to mass incarceration and extreme punishment in America. It is about how easily we condemn people in this country and the injustice we create when we allow fear, anger, and distance to shape the way we treat the most vulnerable among us. ...My work with the poor and the incarcerated has persuaded me that the opposite of poverty is not wealth; the opposite of poverty is justice...The true

⁴² Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, chap. 2.

measure of our character is how we treat the poor, the disfavored, the accused, the incarcerated, and the condemned.⁴³

What becomes clear as you engage his work is that he is very engaging because he is a storyteller. The power of his writing is in the way in which he tells the stories of the people's lives and his work in their lives, and then combines this with an incisive analysis of how these stories fit into the injustice created by mass incarceration of the disenfranchised. One chapter in particular in *Just Mercy* speaks into this project. The chapter is entitled, "Mother, mother." It is, of course, a chapter in which he focuses on the lives of women—many of whom have been incarcerated in conditions that are similar to the stories I heard both as a counselor and in the interviews that I conducted. In this chapter, Stevenson discusses how the incarceration of women has risen exponentially in recent years and also the personal nature of the crimes for which women are convicted. In the United States between the years 1980 and 2010 the number of women sent to prison increased 646 percent.⁴⁴ This is rate of increase that is 1.5 times higher than the increase in incarceration of men during the same period of time. Why are so many more women being incarcerated now? Stevenson discusses the personal nature of the crimes that women are convicted of committing (most often against their children and husbands), as well as the way in which public reaction to such crimes influences the criminal justice system and therefore the sentences that women receive.

⁴³ Bryan Stevenson, *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption* (New York: Random House Publishing Group, 2014), Kindle, Introduction.

⁴⁴ Stevenson, *Just Mercy*, chap. 12.

In this chapter, Stevenson tells the story of a woman named Marsha Colbey, who was convicted of the murder of her infant that was actually stillborn.⁴⁵ He demonstrates how conditions of extreme poverty, public outcry about crimes against children, and faulty and incomplete work on the part of a medical examiner came together to affect the incarceration of this mother of six other children. Stevenson writes:

Unbelievably, Marsha Colbey—a few short weeks after delivering her stillborn son—found herself arrested and charged with capital murder. Alabama is among the growing list of states that make the murder of a person under the age of fourteen a capital offense punishable by the death penalty. The child-victim category resulted in a tremendous increase in the number of young mothers and juveniles who were sent to death row. All five women on Alabama’s death row were condemned for the unexplained deaths of their young children or the deaths of abusive spouses or boyfriends— all of them. In fact, nationwide, most women on death row are awaiting execution for a family crime involving an allegation of child abuse or domestic violence involving a male partner.⁴⁶

During my years of doing pastoral counseling with women, I found that many of my clients had in fact been incarcerated for second-degree murder of a family member. Most of the women I saw who had been convicted of murder had been convicted of killing (or not stopping someone else from killing) their child or another family member. One of the hardest times that I had in my residency was as I sat weekly with a woman who had spent decades in prison for the death of her infant daughter. Whenever she talked about the crime for which she was convicted, it sounded very clear to me as if her daughter died from a failure to thrive due to an unexplained medical condition. She had other well-cared-for children, and the loss of her daughter, and the later loss of her other children and then her incarceration for decades, seemed unimaginable. But, reading Stevenson’s chapter reminded me that it is not amazing—it is unfortunately all too

⁴⁵ Stevenson, *Just Mercy*, chap. 12.

⁴⁶ Stevenson, *Just Mercy*, chap. 12.

common. For me, as a counseling resident, the most challenging aspect of counseling this woman was to respect her resiliency and future plans and not to refocus her on the injustice and the grief that she had experienced decades earlier. She had made some kind of peace with it—it was what it was, and now she had a future to plan and other children with whom to reconnect as a mother who could be physically present in their lives.

As this project is concerned with collateral consequences of incarceration as a salient aspect of reentry, Stevenson is helpful in delineating the disproportionate severity of these consequences for women returning from prison. He gives us the figures: About 75 to 80 percent of women incarcerated in the United States are women who have minor children. These children become higher risk in quantifiable ways when their mothers are imprisoned, but also in ways that cannot be counted and catalogued in the way that losing access to public housing, the inability to receive food stamps, etc. can. When we arrest and imprison mothers of young children, we make vulnerable populations more vulnerable. Taken with Michelle Alexander's concern for the "closed circuit of perpetual marginality" created by the prison label we only begin to imagine the concerns and insecurities faced by women who are returning citizens. Stevenson puts it this way, "In the last twenty years, we've created a new class of 'untouchables' in American society, made up of our most vulnerable mothers and their children."⁴⁷

While incarcerated, particularly when that incarceration lasts for decades as I know from listening to them, mothers agonize over the struggles that their children have, knowing that they have such limited ability to help them in any substantive way. I counseled women whose children largely grew up without them present because these women had spent decades in prison

⁴⁷ Stevenson, *Just Mercy*, chap. 12.

but, for so many of them, the desire to help their children both then and now was so strong it was often the subject that we would discuss at length during their weekly sessions. Knowing that your children are suffering without you, their mother, present in their lives is a kind of collateral consequence that is extremely real and significant, but which cannot be quantified.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have given a brief overview of the ways in which social, political, economic and racial tensions and conflicts in the United States come together in the phenomenon of mass incarceration resulting in the last decades in the imprisonment of millions of American adults, and continued disenfranchisement for the economically disadvantaged and people of color. I have also discussed some of the realities of correctional control and the collateral consequences of incarceration that remain with returning citizens and their families for a lifetime. Finally, I have illustrated the significant salience of incarceration and collateral consequences specific to women. I have not given this subject deep analysis in this chapter, as that would be impossible and would be the work of many more projects. However, my intention in including this chapter was to illustrate and contextualize. My hope is that this chapter gives a context to the lived experience reported by my research partners and begins to give a perspective on what I am arguing needs transformation and that can be affected through this and other future work in the field of practical theology.

Chapter Four

Trauma and the Christian Narrative

Introduction

When I have spoken to women who have been sentenced to life and incarcerated for many years before their release, both in the course of the interviews that I conducted for this project and also in the years that I did spiritually integrative counseling with them, I heard in their stories and in their struggles the experience of trauma and resilience. Beginning with the women's stories I heard during my residency at The Clinebell Institute, I became interested in trauma in a few specific ways. First, I wondered what makes psychological and spiritual trauma different from other forms of suffering? Christianity has reckoned explicitly with suffering throughout its history, but until recently has not differentiated trauma from other forms of generalized suffering. This sparked my interest as I started to think about trauma as embedded within the Christian narrative and what it means to prepare to be the resilient community in which there is a structure and a pattern to respond to individual and communal experiences of trauma. Therefore, in order to develop an understanding about what Christianity had to contribute to the understanding of trauma and resilience, I began to research what both pastoral and systematic theologians were writing about trauma. Again, until relatively recently, the writing by theologians on trauma was relatively sparse.

This chapter focuses on the writing by systematic and pastoral theologians on the relationship between trauma, grace and resilience. It lays a foundation from which to build a conversation with the lived experience of the women that I interviewed for this project who told me both explicitly and implicitly that they are working through Post-Traumatic Stress as they continue to transition out of living in a culture of incarceration. I begin this chapter by

discussing why trauma is particularly salient to Christianity, and then I review the work of prominent pastoral theologians who write on trauma in order to develop a sense of how scholars in this field have treated the integration of trauma and Christian religious experience. I follow this by relating some of the ways in which the women that I have listened to have articulated their experience of trauma through incarceration. I end with a discussion on the possibilities present for mutual healing, as post-incarcerated women and Christian community are integrated around the experience of healing, and becoming the resilient community.

Trauma and the Christian Narrative

In her book, *Theology and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World*, Serene Jones brings together a series of essays in which she explores the ways in which the fields of theology and trauma theory mutually inform and critique one another. Her focus is primarily on our human experience of self and salvation and how trauma influences the way in which, as Christians, we locate ourselves and experience ourselves within God's salvific narrative. She draws on the work of Judith Herman and Bessel A. van der Kolk, both prominent writers in the field of trauma theory, to develop a framework in which she explores the many ways that individual and collective violence affect the ways we understand ourselves and understand the world by altering our very fundamental processes of knowing, remembering, acting and loving.⁴⁸ Her central contention is that because trauma changes us in ways that are so fundamental to how we perceive the interrelationships between ourselves and the world, the experience of trauma has the potential to alter our understanding of how grace is experienced, how we remember Jesus' death, and how

⁴⁸ Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), Kindle, Introduction.

we assess the character of Christian practice.⁴⁹ In her collection of writings, she hopes to demonstrate the way in which we “grapple with the profound existential and moral questions raised by experiences of overwhelming violence and their long-term effects on communal and personal formation--and the reality of grace that exists in the midst of it all.”⁵⁰

Jones identifies the following question as one that developed for her when she was reading trauma theory and one that remained with her as a focus for the ten years that it took her to write her book: “*How do people whose hearts and minds have been wounded by violence, come to feel and know the redeeming power of God’s grace?*”⁵¹ The thesis of her book is this: People who experience trauma are changed through the experience of being overwhelmed cognitively and psychically. The changes that happen to a person who has been traumatized affects the ways that person knows and feels. Therefore, it becomes difficult for the victims of trauma to experience the healing powers of God’s grace because the facilities we use to know and experience have been altered and perhaps even disabled. Jones asks us to grapple with how one can feel the divine if one’s ability to feel has been incapacitated.⁵² Jones lays out two fundamental faith claims that help her to configure the images of trauma and grace that she brings into communion, and thinking about these two claims as intertwined and interrelated helps to demonstrate how she envisions the complicated relationship between trauma and grace. The two faith claims that Jones makes are: “First, we live in a world profoundly broken by violence

⁴⁹ Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, Introduction.

⁵⁰ Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, Introduction.

⁵¹ Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, Introduction.

⁵² Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, Introduction.

and marred by harms we inflict upon each other. Second, God loves this world and desires that suffering be met by hope, love and grace.”⁵³

Pastoral Theologians’ Contribution to the Conversation on Trauma and Resilience

Picking up on Jones’ dual faith claims of brokenness and God’s desire to meet our suffering with grace, hope and love, I am now going to explore the ways in which pastoral theology and pastoral theologians have conceptualized trauma, and worked specifically within the purview of pastoral theological paradigms to offer thoughts on care for those who have experienced trauma. In order to do this, I am going to begin by looking at trauma from a diagnostic perspective to help us define our terms. I will then review the work by a number of contemporary pastoral theologians active in the academy today who are taking on this issue of trauma in their work. I will compare and contrast their work as I bring out similarities and differences in their approaches, suggest places where they could strengthen their work by bringing it into conversation with one another, and also offer my opinion about next steps for pastoral theologians working with trauma.

In her influential work on trauma, Judith Herman offers this definition of trauma and thereby differentiates trauma from suffering in general:

Traumatic events are extraordinary, not because they occur rarely, but rather because they overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life. Unlike commonplace misfortunes, traumatic events generally involve threats to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death. They confront human beings with the extremities of helplessness and terror, and evoke the responses of catastrophe.⁵⁴

⁵³ Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, Introduction.

⁵⁴ Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence, from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), Kindle, chap. 2.

Many of the pastoral and systematic theologians who have written on trauma use Herman's work, and therefore the above working definition of trauma that Herman offers is the understanding of trauma as it interacts with Christian narrative that will guide the thoughts on trauma in this work.

Pastoral Theologians on Trauma

Storm Swain

In her text *Trauma and Transformation at Ground Zero: A Pastoral Theology*, Dr. Storm Swain engages the streams of trauma theory, the theological work of Saint Augustine, and the Psychoanalytic work of D. W. Winnicott in order to think about trauma through the work of chaplains who served at the temporary mortuary at ground zero after 9/11. I want to start with Dr. Swain's work because she makes a compelling case concerning the importance of engaging trauma as pastoral theologians and caregivers, and in doing so she locates trauma on a continuum of care. More than the other theologians I will discuss in this project, Dr. Swain provides a framework for thinking about trauma that is useful in evaluating the work being done in trauma in pastoral theology. This makes her work a helpful place to begin, and her analysis of trauma and its treatment through pastoral theological thought and care is a very significant contribution.

When evaluating chaplains' responses to trauma, Dr. Swain makes the claim that by answering the questions that serving the traumatized brings to the spiritual caregiver (i.e., What does it mean to love in a time of trauma? How do we minister to those traumatized?) we are pushed beyond the application of our caregiving skills and interventions to "creating a fabric of

meaning and a way of being with another.”⁵⁵ She contends that it is not because the questions that we ask are unique to work with traumatized persons, but that working with trauma brings into a kind of high relief the resources we draw upon and the questions that guide our spiritual care in all pastoral ministry.⁵⁶

She argues that the Trinitarian image of God that is both trinity and unity is acted out in our relationships with one another. She correlates the three relational movements that she identifies as “Earth-Making, Pain-bearing and Life-giving” with the psychoanalytic thought of Winnicott and discusses relational spaces of “Holding, Suffering and Transforming.” She offers this framework as a way of moving through trauma so that the constrictive outcome of trauma represented in symptoms of PTSD (arousal, avoidance) and compassion fatigue or secondary traumatic stress can be minimized and resilience and post-traumatic growth can be fostered.⁵⁷

Very useful for this project are Dr. Swain’s thoughts on *how and why* pastoral theology is helpful in treating trauma. Dr. Swain identifies two streams of trauma theory: the symptomatic and the analytic. The symptomatic focuses on symptoms produced by trauma, and the analytic focuses on the meaning of trauma. She identifies that, since the introduction of PTSD to the DSM III in 1980, much of the research on trauma has focused on symptoms. However, it is worth noting that PTSD is one of the few diagnoses in the DSM III that identifies a causative agent—a stressor that brings on symptoms. In terms of *analysis*, we note that trauma is

⁵⁵ Storm Swain, *Trauma and Transformation at Ground Zero: A Pastoral Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), Kindle, Introduction.

⁵⁶ Swain, *Trauma and Transformation*, Introduction.

⁵⁷ Swain, *Trauma and Transformation*, Introduction.

complicated by the fact that it is simultaneously objective and subjective. Swain concisely articulates the complication of thinking through trauma when she writes:

Many people may experience the same external event; however, diagnosis in the DSM-IV fourteen years later recognized that only some may become traumatized to the extent that they exhibit PTSD, due to whether “the person’s response involved intense fear, helplessness or horror.” In exploring trauma, it is therefore not enough to focus simply on the event but also on the interpretation of the event and the meaning it has to a person. Later we will see that Object Relations theory contributes to this discussion in its own understanding of what traumatizes. Current theory about traumatic stress reflects this tension or balance of focus between internal and external, between environmental and personal, between impact, affect, and interpretation.⁵⁸

As I engage the work of other pastoral theologians who are working on trauma, it is helpful to refer back to the complexities of conceptualizing and treating trauma as articulated by Dr. Swain as reflective of understanding informed by, and treatment that would occur through, theologians working from and within the communal contextual paradigm.

Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger

In her work on trauma, Dr. Hunsinger discusses the unique position pastoral caregivers are in to contribute to the care of those suffering from trauma. Dr. Hunsinger is one of the few pastoral theologians who makes the explicit claim that pastoral theologians, and those involved in the task of pastoral care, have something *unique* to offer to those who are suffering psychological trauma.

In her inaugural lecture at Princeton Theological Seminary entitled, “Bearing the Unbearable: Trauma, Gospel and Pastoral Care,” Professor Hunsinger begins by stating, “Traumatic loss lies at the very heart of the Christian imagination. The souls of those who call

⁵⁸ Swain, *Trauma and Transformation*, Introduction.

themselves Christian are indelibly stamped with the unbearable sorrow of this man, Jesus.”⁵⁹ She builds on this statement which evokes powerful imagery by asserting that Christ, through His divine love, bore what is unbearable for mortal human beings.⁶⁰

She draws on the work of both Bessel Van der Kolk and Judith Herman to articulate her understanding of trauma and its effects, then claims that (Christian) pastoral care has something to offer trauma survivors that secular therapies do not have—*the conviction that nothing can separate us from the love of God*. For the heart of her argument about the contribution of pastoral care to trauma theory she draws from, and builds upon, the work of Dr. Ann Ulanov; Hunsinger writes:

‘Though innocent, Christ suffers as if guilty and ends the logic of evil by taking our suffering onto his body, and not being destroyed by it not by the death it inflicts.’ This is an interpretive framework that no psychiatrist or therapist has to offer, no twelve-step program of self-help group can claim, but which can be preached and taught week after week in the context of ordinary pastoral care: that in overcoming the world, Jesus Christ saves us from both the guilt and the anguish of human sin, as well as the terror and trauma of suffering and death.⁶¹

As Hunsinger turns to discussing the process of healing from trauma, she draws again from Ulanov to demonstrate three key components essential for healing. She pulls three phrases from Ulanov’s work in *The Unshuttered Heart*, to demonstrate what healing requires: First, we must understand that whatever we are afraid of deserves our attention. Second, we need to experience the recall of the trauma in the presence of a reliable other. Third, we need to go through this

⁵⁹ Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger, "Bearing the Unbearable: Trauma, Gospel and Pastoral Care," *Theology Today* 68, no. 1 (2011): 8.

⁶⁰ Hunsinger, "Bearing the Unbearable," 19.

⁶¹ Hunsinger, "Bearing the Unbearable," 20.

process with the knowledge that we don't know how it will come out.⁶² Here Hunsinger demonstrates well the risk involved in undertaking the task of processing trauma, as well as the necessity for *relational holding* by a reliable and authentic presence as a component of healing. She affirms that one does not heal from trauma alone.

Dr. Hunsinger states that that her goal in this lecture was to develop an understanding of the impact of trauma and to look into the role that the gospel and the Church have in healing trauma.⁶³ Hunsinger implicitly locates herself within the communal-contextual paradigm of pastoral care as she contends that healing and care will come through being held in relationship by the person of the pastor, the Christian community and also the Christian tradition.

Dr. Duane Bidwell

Dr. Duane Bidwell is another pastoral theologian who demonstrates pastoral theology's contribution to the understanding of, and recovery from, traumatization. Using heuristic frameworks drawn from Christian asceticism and Buddhist mysticism, Dr. Bidwell proposes and develops a "pneumatramatology" that offers help for caregivers to evaluate and understand the impact of traumatic life events on spiritual selves. He offers a spiritually and theologically informed response to trauma using Walter Brueggemann's notion of the transformation of identity through narrative construction in the Hebrew Bible.

Dr. Bidwell's primary assertion, and I think his most important and original contribution to the development of trauma theory in pastoral literature today, is his articulation of the need for

⁶² Hunsinger, "Bearing the Unbearable," 17.

⁶³ Hunsinger, "Bearing the Unbearable," 10.

pneumatramatology. He defines pneumatramatology as “an understanding of traumatic injury from a spiritual (though not necessarily religious) perspective.”⁶⁴

He identifies the need for pastoral caregivers to privilege process over content—specifically the “process of spiritual transformation,” over “theological content.” His argument is that a skilled and trained professional “psychotraumatologist” offering care to a traumatized person would integrate the psychological importance of reliving stress caused by trauma and preventing PTSD with the content-driven work of systematic theology to inform their response to the spiritual and religious questions that those that have been traumatized are asking.⁶⁵

Particularly helpful here is Dr. Bidwell’s concern for the professional to meet the careseeker where they *both* are psychologically and spiritually and to resist imposing formulaic responses upon those who are in different stages of experiencing traumatic injury. To this end, Dr. Bidwell suggests using a multiplicity of spiritual understandings to help the traumatized. He develops this through exploring the three levels of spirituality understood by Gregory of Nyssa and Pseudo-Dionysius as well as Buddhist concepts of the two truths and interbeing (*paticca samupada*).⁶⁶

From Christian asceticism and mysticism, Dr. Bidwell discusses the understanding of the spirituality of light, cloudiness and darkness. He demonstrates how the traumatized most closely resemble those in the luminous and wilderness state of the spirituality of cloudiness, in which

⁶⁴ Duane R. Bidwell, "Developing an Adequate 'Pneumatramatology': Understanding the Spiritual Impacts of Traumatic Injury," *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling: Advancing Theory and Professional Practice through Scholarly and Reflective Publications* 56, no. 2 (2002):136, accessed November 24, 2012, doi:10.1177/154230500205600204.

⁶⁵ Bidwell, "Developing an Adequate 'Pneumatramatology,' 135.

⁶⁶ Bidwell, "Developing an Adequate 'Pneumatramatology,' 139.

“God may be an ambiguous and shadowy figure.” He posits that the Buddhist understanding of “two truths,” which puts forth the notion that the divine and worldly realities are present all of the time and intermingling in ways not available to human understanding, can assist those who are experiencing the spirituality of cloudiness. Further, he suggests that the concept of “interbeing” can help us to resist the urge to find responses to trauma that lack the complexity inherent in traumatic experience.⁶⁷ Given all of this, Bidwell concisely articulates the task of the pneumatraumatologist in the following way:

From the perspective of the three levels of spirituality, the two realms of truth, and the concept of interbeing, it seems that a pastoral task of the pneumatraumatologist is to help trauma victims and their families break their attachments to the material/ordinary realm, walk into the darkness with confidence, and engage the struggle to understand a God who cannot be grasped through logic or adequately described by language.⁶⁸

It is most important for the caregiver to perceive and meet the traumatized person where they are spiritually. Bidwell continues, “It does no good, for example, to offer a theological explanation from the perspective of the spirituality of light to a person struggling in the spirituality of cloudiness. Yet, that is often what we do when offering a psychosocial interventions and understanding from systematic theology.”⁶⁹

One of the major contributions that Dr. Bidwell makes to the pastoral theological work with trauma theory is to offer a practical way for caregivers to meet those who have been traumatized in the space of being overwhelmed. This is particularly important because, being overwhelmed is one of the major diagnostic criteria that differentiates the experience of trauma from other forms of suffering.

⁶⁷ Bidwell, "Developing an Adequate 'Pneumatraumatology,' 141.

⁶⁸ Bidwell, "Developing an Adequate 'Pneumatraumatology,' 141-142.

⁶⁹ Bidwell, "Developing an Adequate 'Pneumatraumatology,' 142.

Dr. Pamela Cooper-White

Pastoral theologian Dr. Pamela Cooper-White's work has contributed to the understanding of the need to integrate pastoral theology with an understanding of trauma theory. In her chapter, "Opening the Eyes: Understanding the Impact of Trauma on Development," Dr. Cooper-White addresses the effect of trauma on girls and women in particular. She begins her work by demonstrating that the most influential and widely read works on human psychological and faith development (i.e., Erik Erikson, Robert Kegan, Carol Gilligan, James Fowler) contain no mention of "trauma," "abuse," or "sexual abuse."⁷⁰ This is stunning, and Dr. Cooper-White rightly asserts this omission affects the integrity of the work that has been done on human development. She writes: "In this sense, the entire foundation of developmental theory, however accurate a depiction it may offer of certain psychic phenomena, is built upon a 'closing of the eyes,' against the horror of real abuse."⁷¹

Dr. Cooper-White's purpose in her work on trauma is to return to developmental theories and to pose the question: "How does the experience of early trauma derail or block development as it might be understood against the backdrop of normative developmental patterns?"⁷² While Dr. Cooper-White acknowledges that her work in this chapter is highly theoretical, she asserts that it is written primarily through the lens of pastoral psychotherapy. Here she makes a compelling argument about why pastoral psychotherapists should be interested in the striking

⁷⁰ Pamela Cooper-White, "Opening the Eyes: Understanding the Impact of Trauma on Development," in *In Her Own Time: Women and Developmental Issues in Pastoral Care*, ed. Jeanne Stevenson Moessner (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 87.

⁷¹ Cooper-White, "Opening the Eyes," 88.

⁷² Cooper-White, "Opening the Eyes," 89.

omission in the predominant theories of development. Her argument for this exploration as a pastoral theologian is that the work of those who do spiritually integrated care (chaplains, parish ministry, pastoral psychotherapists, pastoral counselors, etc.) are both implicitly and explicitly informed by these developmental theories as they have affected generations of theory and practice. It is clearly important to know the origins of assumptions made in the widely accepted theories of development in order to be better informed about how (and really if we even should) incorporate them into our pastoral care practices.⁷³ Similar to the other pastoral theologians whose work that I have reviewed (Hunsinger, Doehring, Holton) who offer working definitions for trauma, Dr. Cooper-White draws from the definition offered by “trauma specialists.” She writes:

I use the term [trauma] very specifically, following trauma specialists to mean not simply any injury, but rather the deep injury that is accompanied by a feeling of helplessness or powerlessness, an experience of pain combined with the terror of being overwhelmed, and in which normal coping mechanisms fail or are unavailable.”⁷⁴

Dr. Cooper-White proceeds to bring this understanding of trauma into conversation with three groupings of developmental theories: stage theories, relational psychoanalytic theories, and faith development theories.

Although Dr. Cooper-White’s call to pastoral caregivers is to be transformative through making sexual abuse and trauma visible, perhaps her most significant contribution to the development of pastorally informed trauma theory is the powerful way that she names trauma. She writes: “Trauma ultimately is spiritual assault. Because body and self are one in a child’s experience, trauma strikes at the deepest essence or core of self and source of self-worth and

⁷³ Cooper-White, "Opening the Eyes," 89.

⁷⁴ Cooper-White, "Opening the Eyes," 90-91.

integrity.”⁷⁵ In writing this, Dr. Cooper-White is putting the treatment of trauma directly in the purview of spiritual caregivers. She does this implicitly by claiming that trauma affects the core of who we are—our essence--and she does it explicitly by naming trauma as spiritual assault.

Dr. Cooper-White’s work here is very helpful in providing a critical lens through which any attempt at developing trauma theory from a pastoral perspective should be mindful. Our work as pastoral theologians requires that we draw upon and correlate work from those in other fields—particularly the social sciences. When there have been omissions in these fields, it is our responsibility to notice them and, as we are able, offer a corrective so that we can most comprehensively address the need that is present in front of us as caregivers.

Dr. Carrie Doehring

Dr. Carrie Doehring is one pastoral theologian who actually dedicates a book-length work to the study of trauma and traumatization. In her book, *Internal Desecration: Traumatization and Representations of God*, Dr. Doehring takes on the task of designing, implementing and interpreting a complex study in which she explores the following question concerning the correlation between severity of the experience of traumatization and conscious representations of God as either positive or negative. The question that Dr. Doehring wants to explore is:

Is there a significant relationship between the severity of childhood traumatization and conscious representations of God as loving, observing, absent and wrathful, such that the more severe the childhood traumatization, the less prevalent are women’s loving and observing representation of God, and the more prevalent are their wrathful and absent representation of God?⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Cooper-White, "Opening the Eyes," 97.

⁷⁶ Carrie Doehring, *Internal Desecration: Traumatization and Representations of God* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1993), 8.

What Dr. Doehring found after conducting her study was that, even women who reported high traumatization in childhood, retained conscious representations of God that were loving. It was not until traumatization was severe that women reported that the representation of God as loving was significantly decreased, and wrathful and absent God representations were significantly increased.

One significant challenge to Dr. Doehring's study was the methodological complexity of quantitatively studying intrapsychic phenomenon (traumatization and God representations).⁷⁷ Dr. Doehring acknowledges this challenge, and discusses this limitation due to the fact that both traumatization and God representations are at once both conscious and unconscious. This factor necessarily limits the results of the study that aims to examine conscious representations of both. This complication takes on more salience when one considers that the most egregious abuse (and therefore traumatization) would be the most likely to be repressed and not available to the person reporting their conscious memory of level of traumatization.⁷⁸ Perhaps even more challenging is that, as Dr. Doehring puts it, "traumatization and God representations are inter-related bi-directionally, such that one's God representations may shape how one experiences traumatic stressors and one's experience of traumatization may shape one's God representations."⁷⁹

Dr. Doehring intends for this research to help in pastoral clinical and congregational settings by enhancing our understanding of the relationship between traumatization and the development of rigid faith systems. Her hope is that this understanding will help increase the

⁷⁷ Doehring, *Internal Desecration*, 9.

⁷⁸ Doehring, *Internal Desecration*, 10.

⁷⁹ Doehring, *Internal Desecration*, 10.

empathetic response the community has to people who have experienced traumatization so that the community can help in the healing of that early wound.

One of the most significant (if unintended) contributions that Dr. Doehring makes to trauma theory with this work is to demonstrate just how complicated traumatization is when one is finding a way to develop value systems and locate one's self in the world in relationship with questions of ultimate concern.

Another strength of Dr. Doehring's work, and her contribution from the particular location as a pastoral theologian working with trauma and traumatization, is her understanding of the significance of the holy and her ability to locate both trauma and resilience in the communal-contextual paradigm of care. Dr. Doehring articulates the violation of sexual abuse as the desecration of what is holy through the violation of people's bodies. She uses the image of a sanctuary—a sacred place—and demonstrates that the sanctuary can be invaded and polluted by the evil actions of another. Significantly, she also demonstrates that, depending on the response of the community to that desecration, there is hope of restoration. Here, she locates the potential for resilience substantially in the response of the community. Within her work that is sophisticated and often highly technical, she offers the image of the sanctuary, and she calls this image “the poem and the prayer” that surrounds her research project.

Like Dr. Pamela Cooper-White, Dr. Doehring reminds us that perhaps one of the things we should pay attention to in the work of pastoral theologians is the *powerful images* that underlie the understanding of trauma and resilience. As pastoral theologians, we are steeped in thoughts of correlating lived reality with (at times ethereal) matters of ultimate concern. When we are able to put words to this intersection, I want to argue that we come closer than most at

being able to name the truth and communicate both the devastation and hope within the experience. Therefore, I maintain that Dr. Doehring contributes greatly when she writes:

The place within, where we seek God and God awaits us is a sacred place, like churches within our interior landscape. It is our embodiment of the goodness of creation, the goodness of being made, male and female, in the image of God. When our very beings are violated, through physical and sexual violence, this is a desecration of the inner sanctuary. Such desecration may be temporary, in the immediate experience of violence and the acute response to violence that follows. When love surrounds the violated child and caring empathetic adults step in to restore safety, respond to confusion, fear, anger and shame, then the inner temple can be repaired and reconsecrated in such moments of love. When neglect follows violence, then the inner temple remains desecrated, derelict, occupied by squatters: the inner representation formed in the traumatic experience and its aftermath. These are the inner voices that involve shame and fear, and reign like gods in the inner world of the child and later the adult.⁸⁰

The response of the community frames the experience. This is empowering, as it removes the definition of the experience from the act of the perpetrator of violence to the response of the caring community. This is a form of resilience that we are able to conceptualize well when we are self-consciously aware of responding care-fully using the attributes of care present in the communal-contextual paradigm of pastoral care.

Elements of Trauma from Women's Stories

Bringing together the work on trauma of the pastoral theologians that we just reviewed with the reports of lived experience of the trauma in the returning citizens who are the research partners in this project helps illuminate the possibilities for resilience through relationship in intentional Christian community. One of the ways that we do this is to use the helpful questions that Swain, Jones and others ask about relational responses to care for those who have experienced trauma and, in the context of this research, trauma that is inclusive of, but not

⁸⁰ Doehring, *Internal Desecration*, xv.

exclusive to, the experience of long-term incarceration. Remembering that Swain posits that when we ask questions such as: What does it mean to love in a time of trauma? And how do we minister to those traumatized? We are pushed beyond the application of our caregiving skills and interventions to “creating a fabric of meaning and a way of being with another.”⁸¹ In saying this, she names a core vision of the intentional Christian community we explore further in a later chapter—it is a community that seeks to use the Christian narrative, tradition and to be in relationship, guided by the Holy Spirit, entering into a fabric of meaning that informs our way of being together in relationship.

Likewise, we can use the question that Jones identifies as the impetus and guide for her book, *Trauma and Grace*, to help us hear and respond faithfully to the stories of those who have been traumatized through individual relationships as well as through cultural patterns of disenfranchisement and institutional power. Again, Jones asks: “How do people whose hearts and minds have been wounded by violence, come to feel and know the redeeming power of God’s grace?”⁸² This is a question that we could argue all Christian communities should be asking and revisiting regularly—but clearly this does not happen without intention and a plan. However, in forming the community and embedding this question in the formation of the plan for developing all aspects of worship, discipleship, and building relationship within the community, we can prioritize the reception of grace after experiencing violence not only for returning citizens, but for all who have experienced trauma and are seeking grace and transformation, personal, political, systemic, institutional, and more.

⁸¹ Swain, *Trauma and Transformation*, Introduction.

⁸² Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, Introduction.

Using the work of other theologians, we can engage, interpret and perhaps reinterpret traditional understanding of Christian doctrine. For example, Dr. Hunsinger's work helps us to think through the implications of the doctrine of the Atonement. She argues that Christ's death and triumph over death offers us a uniquely Christian interpretive framework that can, "be preached and taught week after week in the context of ordinary pastoral care: that in overcoming the world, Jesus Christ saves us from both the guilt and the anguish of human sin, as well as the terror and trauma of suffering and death."⁸³ Bringing this into conversation with Serene Jones' assertion that, "Christianity does not need to discern the relationship between trauma and grace from a blank slate; after all, it was founded on the story of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. So in a very real way its central story is one of trauma and grace," gives us a confidence in turning to the Christian narratives and stories and trust that within them we will find stories of the people of God suffering trauma, finding grace and using what they have found in and through God to continue on the path that God had set before them.⁸⁴

Theologians, such as Wonhee Anne Joh, take us further because she has developed a revised Christology, in which "the cross works symbolically to embody both *han*/abjection and *jeong*/love."⁸⁵ As will be developed more in the chapter on atonement, this theological orientation enables us to not only reach back into the Christian narrative and biblical stories but also to reach forward into community and relationship building.

⁸³ Hunsinger, "Bearing the Unbearable," 20.

⁸⁴ Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, chap. 1.

⁸⁵ Wonhee Anne Joh. *Heart of the Cross: A Postcolonial Christology* (Louisville, KY.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006) 39.

Dr. Bidwell's, Dr. Cooper-White's and Dr. Doehring's work help us to understand trauma more holistically and to respond to the inseparable spiritual and psychological needs of the person who has experienced violence that has terrified them to the point of overwhelming their coping mechanisms. Dr. Bidwell's use of mysticism seems particularly fruitful, even if principally to provide a heuristic to meet those who have been drawn out of themselves through the violence of another. Mysticism is also outside of language's capacity to capture and explain ordinary lived experience, and is overwhelming to the one experiencing being taken out of space and time for an encounter with God. Perhaps there is value in exploring the experience of mystics within the context of community in which people trying to recover from trauma can find solace and kinship with those who have been taken out of community through a force greater than themselves and then also reintegrated into community to use what they have learned from that experience.

Likewise, both Dr. Doehring and Dr. Cooper White explicitly name trauma as spiritual assault. Although both explore the significance of trauma in early life on development and conceptions of the Holy (and self in relation to the Holy), we can use their work to think through post traumatic growth in relationship as a task of spiritual caregivers enacted in community. First, as has been noted by my research partners for this project and also by the clients that I served at the Clinebell Institute, for many (if not most) women who enter prison for long sentences, incarceration is not their first experience of trauma. Also, for those who were fortunate enough to navigate childhood without experiencing trauma, conceptualizing traumatic assault from the perspective of spiritual assault is still valid as embedded within the definition of trauma as the experience of being overwhelmed, helpless against the assault and unable to control what is happening to your entire being.

Finally Dr. Doebling, more explicitly than perhaps her colleagues, locates the healing—the work of pastoral care in the communal-contextual paradigm—when she makes the claim that the response of the community informs the ongoing experience of the person who suffered the trauma.⁸⁶ Because this is such a powerful claim, and one that the other theologians whose work is represented here also make on different levels, it is worth noting at this juncture how John Patton describes the communal-contextual paradigm of pastoral care as this is the paradigm that informs this project more heavily than the classical or clinical. Patton writes that the communal-contextual paradigm gives us a way to conceive of pastoral care that is based in the biblical tradition and emphasizes the ways in which the people of God brought together by God into community do the work of pastoral care together. He writes, “In the *communal contextual* paradigm, pastoral care is understood to be a ministry of a faith community which reminds members of God’s scattered people that they are remembered.”⁸⁷ I would argue that being remembered and brought into healing relationship through a Christian community formed with this intention is particularly powerful for returning citizens who have been taken out of society, separated and in significant ways isolated. Pastoral care enacted through Christian community becomes even more important when we account for the collateral consequences and the prison label that returning citizens carry with them disallowing them to completely leave behind the identify of “offender,” or “convict.”

⁸⁶ Doebling, *Internal Desecration*, xv.

⁸⁷ John Patton, *Pastoral Care in Context: An Introduction to Pastoral Care* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 5.

Listening to the Voices of Returning Citizens

Listening to the voices, and reflecting upon the words, of returning citizens interviewed for this project offers some valuable insight into thoughts about care for those who have experienced trauma through the experiences of incarceration. All of the pastoral theologians engaged in this chapter make an assumption of safe space from which to recover from interpersonal trauma. I, too, made this assumption when I was engaging this work, as my mind was focused on constructing an intentional Christian community that could function as such a space. However, when we listen to the stories of the women who report suffering trauma while incarcerated and continuing to suffer the effects of that trauma in their daily lives after their release, we hear that the assumption of a safe space is false. The women's stories expose a deficit in our pastoral theological literature about trauma. We have neglected an institutional focus. This is significant for at least two reasons.

First, as Laurel described when she was talking about the difference between long-termers values and those people who are incarcerated for short periods of time, she states: "Here's the big one: when you go into prison and you've got a life sentence you might never get out--so this is life so I have to live it." Prison does not offer the qualities of the "safe space" characterized by attunement, trust, security, reliability, etc., that most of us assume is a foundation for healing from trauma. We need to be able to address this institutional aspect of trauma that these women experience in order to create within a system and an environment that is traumatizing, a space (physical, relational, etc.) in which healing is possible and ongoing. This takes on further salience when we consider our discussion of the collateral consequences of incarceration, the prison label and the challenges of parole that contribute to ongoing identification as an incarcerated person. Even the safe people are hard to identify and trust when one is terrified. For

example, outsiders assume that medical care should be neutral and trustworthy, but I heard time and again from women that it was not. From what I heard in both the interviews and in the counseling I did, it sounds like for the most part women had control over the other inmates with whom they would choose to associate, but they did not have control when it came to the officers or the administration. Therefore, even when people were relatively safe and trustworthy it was hard to know and trust that. Given these experiences we need to consider the institutional traumatization to close the gap that exists in pastoral theological literature on working with those who have experienced trauma. We can hear some of this challenge in this part of Kate's interview:

Me: When you say, "Your life is on the line every day," what do you mean by that?

Kate: You have no idea what is going to happen that day. I mean they could pick you up, throw you in Ad. Seg. and never let you out. They could throw you against the wall as far as that goes; all of which I have seen happen. You need medical care, you could be killed. I was almost killed by doctor U, his medical mistake. Um, it's a very, very insecure world. Because, in fact there is a set of rules that you have to follow. If no matter how hard you try, they can always find something if they choose to do so. I mean leaving your window open at the wrong time can get you a write up. So there's a constant insecurity, and I think it is very much akin to what battered women experience. The level may not be as intense because they are not real likely to punch you in the face; although they have. But you are never completely comfortable. I know before I went to prison I used to sleep like a [?]. I didn't sleep well in prison, and I have never slept well since, because you never know what's coming through that door. But it's not going to be good.

Me: So like the level of vigilance just seems really high. That you have to be on alert day and night?

Kate: yeah.

Me: You know, when I asked you what you meant by that, I was wondering if you were going to say it's because you are living with some violent people and you don't know what's going to happen. But everything you mentioned had to do with the administration and them be unpredictable.

Kate: Um hmm, yeah, you know and it's probably changed a little bit because there's, or this is what they tell me, there's more youngsters there, more violence. But if you mind your own business, no one's going to bother you. I probably was treated differently. It

was easier for me because people figured out right away that maybe I could help them. And so probably I was treated a little bit differently. But I didn't get in the mix. You know, if you brought me a disciplinary, and it said that it was um what do you call them, a paper of drugs, I had to have the person show me what a paper of drugs was. I didn't know how much it was. I didn't have any clue because I didn't mix with that world except when they needed help. I also didn't mix with the cops. Over time there were officers that I became very fond of, and vice versa, But I was not up in their face or anywhere else.

Me: So you were really selective about who you hung out with?

Kate: Well I was terrified...At the beginning, I didn't like any of the cops as far as that goes.... And of course that changed over time.

Me: Yeah. How long did the terrified last?

Kate: Well at least the first six weeks.

Me: Is the first six weeks set off from the rest? Are you in a different area?

Kate: Well yeah. Um being in the reception center wasn't so bad, because you were locked in all the time. The roommate I had in the reception center, [name], had never been to prison in her life. She was 23-years-old. Her boyfriend said, "Oh just take the case, and everything will be fine." So we just clung together. In fact, [officer] came over, and he keyed the door open. We didn't know you could key the door. We didn't know they opened that way. We both jumped, and we are standing in the middle and we are huddled together.

Me: That does sound terrifying

Kate: And he just comes in and he goes, "What's wrong?" And actually [name of a sheriff], who was a friend of mine that I had met in the county, sent him over to check on me to see if I needed anything. He said, "Well, if you need anything let me know," and I am thinking, how in the hell am I going to do that? I have no idea.

Me: So you compared it to men in foxholes and battered women both of whom we think about being traumatized. Would you consider just the fact of being in prison a traumatizing experience?

Kate: Of course, absolutely. And when I was in the reception center there was this one cop, his name was K. Um, that was his last name. And he is the one who barked around the orders for breakfast, you know and all this stuff, and he looked at me one day and he said, "Ugh, you need to smile," and I thought about what? And then years later, I had a very bad asthma attack. It was in the middle of the Santa Ana, and my roommate had always worked for, um, custody. She knew him well. I ended up going out in a 70 mile an hour windstorm with K who was wearing a ski jacket and a ski mask, and he was a big

man anyhow, and he goes, “Here, just take my arm and hang on.” And I’m thinking, if my mother could see this now. (Laughter) I’m out in the middle of the night with this guy who looks exactly like whoever robbed somebody...and I am actually hanging on to him so I don’t blow away.

A second consideration is the observation I have made that, when I ask women about their lives now, they often reach back and tell me about their time incarcerated. Considering some were incarcerated for most of their adult lives, this should be anticipated. But, when we consider healing from trauma, we need to consider both the continuity of experience and the huge disjuncture between living as incarcerated persons and then not. Laurel demonstrates how personally women who have been released can be affected by the experience of their friends and loved ones who are still incarcerated. This excerpt from her interview comes after I commented on how being in the room with her I felt how present and powerful the experience of going before the parole board was even though a number of years had passed since she had engaged that struggle. Laurel responded:

Laurel: Well, it’s not so long ago. I felt like I went through a twelfth time this year. My friend (I’ll use her first name and know that you won’t) M. I knew I had stayed in contact with her and I knew she didn’t have any support. So when she’s telling me at the turning of the year that she is getting ready to go to board, all of a sudden they had advanced her parole board hearing date, she didn’t know what to do. I got involved, I got my church to agree to sponsor her and write support letters. But that meant I had to write the sample letter. It was all the same process as me preparing for board. She went to board on [holiday] They found her suitable for parole, and then we had to wait.

Me: Together

Laurel: Together, together, together, and then she paroled just over three weeks ago. She came home on a Wednesday...I mean there’s just, I’m doing it all over. It’s emotionally, I have now gone through a twelfth. And I had another friend who was granted parole two weeks before M. was and had it taken away this summer. So I mean I’ve gone through the entire thing all over again, because how can you not? I mean M would sit with me and play cards on Thursday evenings while I was, during the five month waiting period to help distract me. She didn’t know until, now she knows how much she was doing when she was doing that. And so yeah, you don’t so easily, so yeah, I’m and now I’m going through the transitions with her...

When we listen to the voices of the women returning from decades of incarceration, what we hear is that the conditions they experienced continue to be present in their lives. They prompt us to identify a next step in developing constructive pastoral theology for addressing trauma; we need to think and talk about how to serve the needs of those who have experienced long-term institutional trauma.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have explored the careful and diverse thought by pastoral theologians about how those who have been traumatized are met by the Christian faith. We can use the work of the theologians represented here to meet the transitioning citizens where they are and help them to know and built upon the resilience that they have revealed in their lives thus far. Every one of the pastoral theologians represented in this chapter either explicitly or implicitly recognized that healing from trauma happens within relationship. Most were clearly working within the communal-contextual paradigm and so, following their lead in the next chapter, we will turn to those working in the field of psychology and psychiatry in order to explore how healing can happen through rupture and repair of relational living and in community.

Chapter Five

Relationship Matters

Introduction

In this chapter I am bringing into the conversation and analysis thinkers and writers primarily from the fields of psychology and psychiatry to build a foundation from which to think about trauma and resilience from a pastoral theological perspective. I will primarily be exploring the work of D. W. Winnicott, and those who have built their work upon his (i.e., Ann Ulanov, etc.), as well as the work of Relational Cultural theorists out of The Stone Center. This chapter will primarily provide a foundation for understanding the practices and proposals that I include in the final chapter on developing an intentional Christian community, integrating the reports of lived experience of incarceration, conceptions of trauma from the perspective of pastoral theologians, and transformative practice that comes out of the intersection of engaging theology, social science and lived experience.

The central concepts I have chosen to inform this chapter are: The development of relationship and staying in connection through conflict, the ways in which as noted by Winnicott rupture and repair in relationships actually make relationships stronger and help the individual to comprehend being loved, the significance and challenges of being dependent and interdependent, critique and awareness of compliance with, constriction of and subversion of patriarchal expressions of “power over,” and mutuality in relationship particularly as these are expressed in prison culture vs. *koinonia*. I begin this chapter with the work of D. W. Winnicott. Noting that several of the theologians represented in the last chapter also, either explicitly or implicitly, use the work of Winnicott when thinking about trauma and resilience as rupture and repair, this seems a fitting place to begin.

The Work of D. W. Winnicott

The work of Dr. D. W. Winnicott is salient to this work in a number of ways but, perhaps better than other social scientists, Winnicott puts forth theories that I will argue (and others before me have demonstrated, Ulanov, Swain, et al.) speak to the basic tenets of living in Christian community and having one's life guided and informed by Christian narrative. Particularly salient to this work is Winnicott's emphasis on creative living, the development and protection of the "true self," the importance of providing a holding function for growth, and the way in which Christian faith and practice ask us to experience our dependence in ways that are life giving. The themes that Winnicott discusses and develops in his work were central time and again in the stories that the women told me during our interviews about their struggles and survival within relationship before, during and after incarceration.

Dr. D. W. Winnicott is famous for a number of things, but two in particular are interrelated and particularly salient to thinking about the practical aspects of his work. The first is Winnicott's celebration of paradox. Winnicott did not try to resolve the paradoxes that presented themselves as his work evolved; rather he worked with them to cultivate a deeper understanding of development through relationship. One of the central paradoxes that Winnicott lifts up is a statement for which he is famous: "There is no such thing as an infant."⁸⁸ In this one sentence, he is demonstrating that in order for there to be an individual there has to at first be an interrelated dyad. We all experience ourselves in the context of relationship.

⁸⁸ D. W. Winnicott, *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development* (New York: International Universities Press, 1965), 145.

Because Winnicott placed such an emphasis on the development of health that developed from the “good-enough mother” and child dyad, an exploration of this concept will be the central focus of the contribution Winnicott makes to the understanding of how healing is experienced in and through relationship. In order to organize Winnicott’s contribution, I am going to explore the salient features that constitute good-enough parenting, and discuss the reason that “good-enough parenting” is central to the health and development of an individual as well as explore how we might use this concept in thinking about this communally as well as individually.

The Good-enough Mother

In order to appreciate why good-enough mothering is so central to Winnicott’s understanding of health, I need to briefly note here what I will develop later. If the mothering in the mother-infant dyad is “good-enough,” then the infant is able to relax in her environment enough to forget the mother. This state of relaxation fosters creativity and frees the infant from needing to organize her experience (and therefore herself) around reacting to the mother’s needs. The mother provides an environment in which the child can love, hate, be aggressive, be loving, and still find a consistent and reliable mother available to her time and again. Therefore, a primary function of the good-enough mother is to create in her relationship with her infant an environment in which her infant experiences enough attunement and consistent, reliable, responsiveness that she may experience her realness in the response of her mother to her, and is not organizing herself around reacting to her environment.

Of course, there is a clear link between the well-attuned mother and the well-attuned counselor. The infant (careseeker) is able to do that work because she has the experience of being held in an environment and relationship that is *reliable, attuned and imperfect but*

repairable within the amount of time that the infant (careseeker) can attend to. All these things come together to let the infant (careseeker) *risk growth* despite the anxiety that accompanies growth because in the holding of the good-enough mother/community the anxiety of the infant (careseeker) can be tolerated well enough, and not become trauma that interrupts the continuity of being. In the words “active adaptation” below, we can hear Winnicott saying that this is an ongoing and dynamic process between mother and infant—caregiver and careseeker. Winnicott writes:

The good-enough ‘mother’ (not necessarily the infant’s own mother) is one who makes active adaptation to the infant’s needs, an active adaptation that gradually lessens, according to the infant’s growing ability to account for the failure of adaptation and to tolerate the results of frustration if *all goes well* the infant can actually come to gain from the experience of frustration, since incomplete adaptation to need makes objects real, that is to say hated as well as loved.⁸⁹

The importance of this reality of relationship; that trust and love are being communicated between infant and mother, client and counselor *in the failures of empathy and the misattunements that can then be repaired* is an essential understanding for a foundation of the rest of Winnicott’s work as well as for Winnicott’s relevance to this project. In order to find relevance in the work of Winnicott for the development of the intentional Christian community, we must be able to move from the clinical paradigm to the communal-contextual paradigm of pastoral care. Winnicott is an excellent model for how the relationship between an infant and mother can be useful to the clinical context. In order to use his work meaningfully, I will take what I have learned from this transition of caring models between infant and mother to the clinical paradigm and apply it to the communal-contextual context so that those salient relational

⁸⁹ D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*. Routledge Classics (London: Routledge, 2005), 14.

qualities can be used in community. In the development of the intentional community that this project is proposing, it will be imperative that we can make that shift from clinical context to community. It is equally important that in conceptualizing relationships in which attunement and response is needed, that we are not striving for perfection, but that in the imperfection--the good-enough--there will be the growth in relationship, trust and the communication of love that is required to make the community a relationally strong enough holding environment for healing and transformation.

Soon, I will turn my attention to Winnicott's explanation of the development of the self that is born out of the mother/infant dyad. Winnicott argues that, when there is health, this is due to good-enough parenting. But first, I want to turn to what Winnicott holds as the gold standard for experiencing life and achieving growth: Creativity.

Creativity

I think it is fair to say that, for Winnicott, in the most direct and simple terms, creativity is life—the capacity for creativity is certainly health. In a paper entitled “Living Creatively,” which Winnicott wrote shortly before his death, Winnicott does not equate health with normality, but rather with a capacity for creativity.⁹⁰ Concerning creativity, Winnicott writes:

Whatever definition we arrive at, we must include the idea that life is worth living or not, according to whether creativity is or is not a part of an individual person's living experience. *To be creative, a person must exist and have a feeling of existing, not in conscious awareness, but as a basic place to operate from.* Creativity is then the doing that arises out of being. It indicates that she who is: is alive. Impulse may be at rest, but when the word “doing” becomes appropriate, then already there is creativity. *Creativity*

⁹⁰ Stephen Tuber, *Attachment, Play, and Authenticity: A Winnicott Primer* (Lanham, MD: Jason Aronson, 2008), 62.

*then is the retention throughout life of something that belonged properly to the infant experience: the ability to create the world.*⁹¹

At the heart of Winnicott's theory of creativity is the notion of "primary psychic creativity." That is, an inherited drive towards health, a creative drive. "The mother's ability to adapt to her infant's needs allows the baby to feel that he has created the object (mother) out of his own need from this beginning, the sense of self can begin to grow."⁹² Already, we can see the significance to welcoming women in the "lifer" population who are transitioning out of prison after decades inside. It is significant when thinking about women who have been in prison for long sentences to remember, and perhaps more importantly to remind them, that the human spirit has a basic drive toward health. In Christianity the notion of an inherent drive toward health manifested as creativity is particularly significant in two ways: (a) as we understand and locate ourselves within creation and (b) understand ourselves as contributing to the care and ongoing contribution to God's good creation.

Winnicott is interested and invested in differentiating between health and life. As Christians, we can join Winnicott in his care for creativity as promoting life—and life abundant. Winnicott understood that the mother's function was to protect her child from the break in continuity of "going on being." Essentially, her role is to protect her child from trauma that would produce unthinkable anxiety and force the child to derail her development in order to protect herself. Winnicott always had a greater arc in mind, and he moves from the mother/infant

⁹¹ D.W. Winnicott, "Living Creatively," in *Home is Where We Start From*, eds. Clare Winnicott, Ray Shepherd and Madeleine Davis (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990), 39-40.

⁹² Jan Abram and Hjulmand Knud. *The Language of Winnicott: A Dictionary of Winnicott's Use of Words*. 2nd ed. (London: Karnac Books, 2007), 144, accessed April 25, 2011, <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10497308>.

dyad into the self related to culture and creativity, and this is the bridge that brings the individual continually into relationship with culture. He writes:

What is life about? You may cure your patient and not know what makes him or her go on living. It is of first importance for us to acknowledge openly that absence of psychoneurotic illness may be health, but it is not life. It is these cultural experiences that provide the continuity in the human race that transcends personal existence. I am assuming that cultural experiences are in direct continuity with play, the play of those who have not yet heard of games.⁹³

Winnicott's understanding of the location of the cultural experience hinges on the person's ability to unconsciously remember "the mother's protection" and good object presenting at the early moments of life. "When this experience has been internalized the person has an internal resource from which to live creatively."⁹⁴For Winnicott, the search for the self as an ongoing act related to creativity is dependent on the careseeker's perception of the holding environment and the reliability of the setting. It is essential in this environment that this search comes out of the careseeker in their own time. In order to be creative, one must be free enough from the experience of anxiety to relax and play. This can only happen within a relationship that is reliable.

The significance here is that through this relaxed surrender to uncertainty, the careseeker will be able to access her own creativity. As mentioned earlier in this section, a significant aspect of creative living comes from the bringing together of being and doing. This is what Winnicott explores as the bringing together the male and female aspects of one's self and one's experience.⁹⁵ Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter to explore at length how Winnicott

⁹³ Abram and Knud, *The Language of Winnicott*, 121.

⁹⁴ Abram and Knud, *The Language of Winnicott*, 121.

⁹⁵ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 74.

understands the male and female aspects of self and their development it is worth noting that Winnicott asserts, “Creative living is associated with the bringing together of male and female elements with the ability to both *be* and *do* and this has to appear in a sequence: ‘After being doing and being done to—but first being’”⁹⁶

If we think about the significance that Winnicott places on the bringing together of being and doing in light of living creatively in the context of Christian community, we can see that the primacy of being is in the belovedness of our creation. We are loved, and then we love out of our created being. We express this love through Christian discipleship--how we act in the world to love God, neighbor and self. In a sense, Winnicott's interest in the creative doing that comes out of being has interesting theological connection to the basis of the Reformed theological precept that all that we do is in response to God's love for us. This strengthens the rationale for using Winnicott's work and thought to think about the significance of relationship to identity, health and well-being in the creation of an intentional Christian community through a movement of the Presbyterian Church (USA). What Winnicott so often says in a variety of ways is that we have a responsibility to create a space for one another to rest within because it is in the resting that we are able to bring out and discover what has been created good in us. This discovery is a process and the process can only unfold if we are not overwhelmed by anxiety. In the next few sections I will discuss what Winnicott sets up as the antithesis to creativity—compliance and the cost of compliance.

⁹⁶ Abram, *The Language of Winnicott*, 129.

Creativity and Compliance

In his work on the origins of creativity, Winnicott explores the idea of creativity and examines the contrast between creativity and compliance. As noted earlier, Winnicott argues that creativity, more than anything else, makes an individual feel that life is worth living. He contrasts this to an individual's experience of relating to external reality with compliance. Compliance with external reality means a relationship with the world as something that must be fit into or demands adaptation. He writes,

Compliance carries with it a sense of futility for the individual and is associated with the idea that nothing matters and that life is not worth living. In a tantalizing way many individuals have experienced just enough of creative living to recognize that for most of their time they are living uncreatively, as if caught up in the creativity of someone else, or a machine.⁹⁷

Just as Winnicott contends that living creatively is living in health, he works out that living in a state of compliance denotes illness. In terms of applying Winnicott's theory about creativity and compliance to women lifers (particularly due to their decades living under conditions of extreme compliance while incarcerated), it is important to consider Winnicott's contention that it is wrong to think of creativity as something that can be utterly destroyed, but that environmental attributes influence the individual's ability for creative apperception. This lengthy quote, I hope, demonstrates this important point. Winnicott writes:

But when one reads of individuals dominated at home, or spending their lives in concentration camps or under lifelong persecution because of a cruel political regime, one first of all feels that it is only a few of the victims who remain creative. These of course are the ones who suffer. It appears at first as if all the others who exist (not live) in such pathological communities have so far given up hope that they no longer suffer, and they must have lost the characteristic that makes them human, so that they no longer see the world creatively. These circumstances concern the negative of civilization. This is looking at the destruction of creativity in individuals by environmental factors acting at a late date in personal growth the link can be made, and usefully made, between creative

⁹⁷ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 87.

living and living itself, and the reasons can be studied why it is that creative living can be lost and why the individual's feeling that life is real or meaningful can disappear.⁹⁸

In light of these environmental factors that can collude to stifle creative living, it is important to also lift up that Winnicott writes that there can always be found ways to live creatively—this is resilience and a form of resilience that is particularly salient to the women in the population that I am considering here. Winnicott writes about the individual's ability to retain something that is personal, perhaps even secret, and that without confusion belongs to the individual. He suggests that if all else fails, focus on breathing—as “this is something that no one can do *for* you.”⁹⁹ Of course the environmental factors that favor either living creatively or living primarily in a state of compliance have to do with the holding environment, and so it is to Winnicott's development of the significance of holding that we now turn.

Holding, Dependence and Christian Community

In his essay, “The Concept of the Healthy Individual,” Winnicott discusses the function of holding as one that allows the individual to develop according to her “inherited tendencies.” Given an environment in which the baby is held well enough, Winnicott contends that the result will be “a continuity of existence that becomes a sense of existing, a sense of self, and eventually results in autonomy.”¹⁰⁰ According to Winnicott, the original holding environment is created by maternal care just before and immediately following the birth of a baby. The holding

⁹⁸ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 91-93.

⁹⁹ Winnicott. “Living Creatively,” 43.

¹⁰⁰ D. W. Winnicott, “The Concept of the Healthy Individual,” in *Home is Where We Start From: Essays by a Psychoanalyst*, eds. Clare Winnicott et al, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1986), 27-28.

environment then extends beyond the mother to other significant caregivers and to society at large, and the holding environment retains its significance for every person throughout life.¹⁰¹

The importance of holding, and specifically holding-in-mind was central to Winnicott's work in developing the correlation between the good-enough mother paradigm and what could be provided in the therapeutic healing environment.¹⁰²

Holding takes on a special salience in Christian Community. Ann Ulanov discusses the link between our ability to tolerate the anxiety that accompanies utter dependence and holding in relation to central Christian precepts. She asserts that spiritual living is embodied living, and with the body comes all of the fear that no one will meet our needs.¹⁰³ For Winnicott, the development of the person, the holding space and the transitional phenomena are inextricably intertwined.

Ulanov builds quite remarkably on Winnicott's assertion that there are common attributes between the "good-enough-mother" and the "good-enough-God" when she writes,

What we want to know is: Is there anything we can really count on? If it goes away will it come back again? Is this reality recoverable if lost? Will it survive the test of time, and my neglect of it, my forgetting it, or even my abandoning it? Will whatever we believe in survive my defection from it, or destruction of it and come back to me, notice me, attend to me out of itself? And is this God a God for all human beings, not just for me or my tribe alone? Can we hold on to something that brings peace and assurance and know somehow that it holds onto us?¹⁰⁴

Ulanov's thoughts about the "good-enough God" are helpful particularly as we think about locating our faith narratives within the larger Christian faith narrative. In order to use

¹⁰¹ Abram and Knud, *The Language of Winnicott*, 193.

¹⁰² Abram and Knud, *The Language of Winnicott*, 194.

¹⁰³ Ann Belford Ulanov, *Finding Space: Winnicott, God, and Psychic Reality* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 10.

¹⁰⁴ Ulanov, *Finding Space*, 19.

Winnicott's and Ulanov's work to inform the healing relational aspects of community we must always remember that the attributes of the relationship between mother and child that make a mother "good-enough" are responsiveness, attunement, and giving room for a child to grow and to develop in the gaps of perfect responsiveness and attunement through the trust that the connection will continue.

Ulanov is also instructive in thinking about the role of the holding function in relationship as she links holding with the ability to rest. She articulates that holding that is good enough allows us to move from a state of integration to non-integration and back again without the stress and anxiety produced by the fear of annihilation if we were to be dropped. As both Ulanov and Winnicott develop the context influenced by respectful holding of another, we come more specifically into the area of what happens in the holding spaces, and this of course is the development of the self or the impeded development of the self.

The topic of dependence, as it figures in Winnicott's system of thought, has particular salience for Christian Community in terms of thinking about setting the parameters in which we experience rupture and repair, and therefore growth in relationship. Winnicott discusses three stages of dependence, "absolute dependence," "relative dependence," and "towards independence." Absolute dependence and relative dependence are facilitated in a person in infancy given a good enough environment. If a person is able to negotiate these first two stages of dependency then they are set up well to move into the developmental stage of moving "toward independence."¹⁰⁵ It is important to state at this early stage of this discussion of independence that--although Winnicott locates the movement from absolute dependence toward independence as growth--he does not say that absolute independence is ever achieved. Rather, he contends that

¹⁰⁵ Abram and Knud, *The Language of Winnicott*, 130.

the achievement of health is interdependence, and he directly states this in his paper, “From Dependence towards Independence in the Development of the Individual,” where he writes, “Independence is never absolute. The healthy individual does not become isolated, but becomes related to the environment in such a way that the individual and the environment can be said to be interdependent.”¹⁰⁶

Of the three stages that Winnicott discusses (listed above), I will only give attention to the stage of relative dependence. It is the corollary of this stage in therapeutic settings, and I posit perhaps in the resilient community, in which the most work is done--particularly in the process of developing the secure feeling of being loved. This feeling is engendered through the ongoing process of failure and reparation between counselor and client—and perhaps in the interpersonal relationships that develop intentionally in the resilient community.

In the state of relative dependence, the infant has some awareness of her dependence on her mother. This is the stage in which the infant distinguishes between “Me and Not-me.” This stage is characterized by “adaptation with gradual failing of adaptation.”¹⁰⁷ The attunement of mother to her infant is still exceptionally important in this stage, but perfect attunement would be detrimental to the development of the infant. More important than perfect attunement is *authenticity*. In her authentically imperfect yet reliable response to her child, the good-enough mother helps the child in the ongoing process of meaning making.

¹⁰⁶ D.W. Winnicott, “From Dependence Towards Independence,” in the Development of the Individual,” in *The Maturation Process and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development* (New York: International Universities Press, 1965), 84.

¹⁰⁷ Winnicott, “From Dependence Towards Independence,” 87.

In the stage of relative dependence, it is the mother's failures that actually communicate reliability. Winnicott writes eloquently about the connection between attunement, failure, repair and love. The mother's authentic reliability facilitates attunement and this is communicated to the infant as love. However, paradoxically, the baby does not know about the communication of love except from the failures of perfect reliability—authenticity and responsiveness is key.¹⁰⁸

Winnicott writes:

These relative failures with immediate remedy undoubtedly add up eventually to a communication, so that the baby comes to know about success. Successful adaptation thus gives a sense of security, a feeling of having been loved. It is the innumerable failures followed by the sort of care that mends that build up into a communication of love, of the fact that there is a human being there who cares. Where failure is not mended within the requisite time, second, minutes, hours, then we use the term deprivation.¹⁰⁹

In short, dependence matched with reliability communicates love. Winnicott's emphasis is on how a mother must act on behalf of her infant in order to protect her from the break in the continuity- of-being (which is experienced as trauma--as unthinkable anxiety). In the absence of this trauma, the infant is constantly in the process of being cured by the mother's love and affection and this heals the ego-structure of the infant and the infant's understanding of unity.¹¹⁰

The work of Ann Ulanov, in her book *Finding Spaces*, is particularly helpful in thinking about Winnicott's concept of dependence through a lens of spiritual awareness and theological care. In *Finding Spaces*, Ulanov emphasizes how we embrace dependence as part of our spiritual growth. She affirms the process of deepening the dependence that we feel rather than trying to

¹⁰⁸ Abram and Knud, *The Language of Winnicott*, 144.

¹⁰⁹ Abram and Knud, *The Language of Winnicott*, 144.

¹¹⁰ Abram and Knud, *The Language of Winnicott*, 144.

reduce it as people who are engaged in a spiritual life and interested in living authentically: She writes:

Religion urges us to recognize our dependence as creatures on a Creator as our true state. Religion puts dependence right at the center of authentic living without reaching this radical dependence; we conduct a spiritual life in the company of God but are never pierced by a living encounter with the divine. For we do not grow out of this dependence. Spiritual life consists, rather, in our deepening it.”¹¹¹

She is speaking here to the reality of relational living. Although there is certainly a vast distinction between the relationship of the Creator to the created that is not as easily thought of in parallel terms as we have been thinking about mother/child, counselor/client, careseeker/community—it is significant for the work that we do as persons engaged in pastoral care to think about being created in a relationship in which, in order to have life, and to have it abundantly, we are led to embrace authenticity born through recognition of our utter dependence and vulnerability in relationship to a “good-enough” God. This good-enough God shares qualities of good-enough parenting and caregiving: reliability, responsiveness, allowing for failures and frustrations and providing the relationship to allow us to risk growth despite overwhelming existential anxiety because we can depend on being held in relationship and not abandoned in failure.

Bringing the significance of knowing that one is loved and held by one’s Creator helps bring into focus the ways in which Winnicott’s system of thought works together. Love and, perhaps more than any other love, the love of God helps us to manage to live in a world in which we could—if not held well enough in relationship—become overwhelmed by anxiety. It is more accurate to say that, without the security of knowing that we are held in love, we are likely to

¹¹¹ Ulanov, *Finding Spaces*, 120.

develop defenses that detract from the quality of life through the development of the false self and the sacrifice of creativity. To the extent that we do this we are denied the opportunity to live as creative beings, which is our inherited birthright as children of God.

Again, Ulanov helps illuminate the connection between holding, the development of the true self and the creation and perpetuation of resilience. In the following passage, she writes about how living from the true self helps us to find meaning in suffering:

When true, our self at the core feels real in the world. We can hold ourselves in being, inhabit our bodies and touch others. We can imaginatively elaborate our experiences and arrive at new perceptions. We can go on being, sustaining a sense of continuity through time and space, acquiring history, a narrative thread to our identity. This being of ours proves durable, even in the face of suffering. An adult able to live from a true self makes a good citizen who helps fill the outer world with inner creation and cover the hard blows of fate with creative projections that bring meaning to suffering. Society does not have to carry such citizens in its mental hospitals and prisons, because they have been carried by their parents.¹¹²

Winnicott and Ulanov speak of the experience of being loved openly—as this is proper to the relationship between Creator and created, as well as parent and child. When we turn to the work of Relational Cultural Therapy, we are in a more self-consciously clinical paradigm. Love in the clinical relationship is not named as such but, if we listen for the qualities of growth that develop through a loving relationship, we hear echoes of being loved in one of the most foundational practices to clinical work using RCT: Mutual empathy. Judith Jordan offers a concise definition of mutual empathy so that we can hear the language of transformation and compare it with Winnicott and Ulanov's assertions. What Winnicott and Ulanov call love—I want to argue that RCT theorists call “mattering.” One comes to know that one matters through the process of engaging in mutual empathy. Jordan writes:

¹¹² Ulanov, *Finding Space*, 46.

Mutual empathy [is] openness to being affected and affecting another person. In mutual empathy, both people move with a sense of mutual respect, and intention for mutual growth, and an increasing capacity for connectedness. For mutual empathy to lead to growth, both people must see, know and feel that they are being responded to, having an impact and mattering to one another. The growth that occurs is both affective and cognitive and leads to an enlarged sense of community. Supported vulnerability, a feeling that one's vulnerability will not be taken advantage of or violated, is necessary for mutual empathy.¹¹³

Relational Cultural Theory/Therapy Salience to this Project

Relational Cultural Theory highlights the primacy of connection and the development of the complexity of connection as the place where development and growth occur. It locates relationship as the location of healing. Judith Jordan speaks to the ways in which making women's developmental trajectory normative thereby places the development of connection at the center of relational health. This challenges our ways of understanding ourselves in cultural contexts that have traditionally been organized around a model of health that values independence, and equates autonomy with maturity. This traditional model (even if just implicitly) disparages, invalidates and at times even pathologizes the desire for connection, collaboration and the investment of self in the well-being of relationships. Jordon writes:

Putting connection at the center challenges core beliefs of Western social, psychological, and economic systems. Connection is not a simple, cozy, or easy concept; viewed as the primary organizer and source of motivation in people's lives, it is powerful, complex, and revolutionary, challenging some of the basic tenets and values of twenty-first century Western culture.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Judith V. Jordan, *Relational–Cultural Therapy*, Theories of Psychotherapy Series (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2010), 104.

¹¹⁴ Judith V. Jordan and Maureen Walker, introduction to *The Complexity of Connection: Writings from the Stone Center's Jean Baker Miller Training Institute*, eds. Judith Jordon, Maureen Walker and Linda M. Hartling (New York: The Guilford Press, 2004), 1.

Traditional developmental and clinical models of understanding human personality development, structure and organization are of course informed by, and embedded within, the cultural assumption that the white, male, middle-class heterosexual man's experience is normal and therefore should be the normative standard by which everyone is evaluated and from which programs are conceived, organized and run.

The Stone Center model challenges the theories that promote psychological health as a trajectory with autonomy as the achievement of maturity. In the Stone Center model, isolation is understood to be the primary source of human suffering. Their fundamental belief about human development is that we grow through connection and toward connection. The movement toward developmental maturity happens through relational practices and through the deepening of relationships and forms of connections with one another. In healthy development, the expectation is that people will develop toward “increasingly differentiated and growth-fostering connection.”¹¹⁵ Development is impeded by chronic disconnection that results from important people in our lives being unresponsive. Acute disconnections in relationships can be mended by responsiveness to our concerns that demonstrate that we have an effect on others. The experience of being effective in relationships and mattering to the relationship fosters growth, development, and an experience of relational competence.¹¹⁶ Understanding that one's experience matters to another is important on an individual level in interpersonal relationships to reduce relational disconnection, and it is also important on a societal level as we are all embedded in multiple cultural identities—some privileged and others subjugated. It is central to

¹¹⁵ Jordan and Walker, Introduction.

¹¹⁶ Jordan and Walker, Introduction.

the development of RCT that mutuality is maintained through connections built across and between people located in, and self-identified with, subjugated cultural identities. Jordan writes:

We also care deeply that power differentials, forces of stratification, privilege, and marginalization can disconnect and disempower individuals and groups of people. The exercise of power over others (dominance), unilateral influence, and/or coercive control is a prime deterrent to mutuality.¹¹⁷

One of the most challenging aspects of learning and practicing from the RCT model is to consistently revise one's understanding of how development occurs—and to consistently de-center the self. In "Revisiting Empathy," Janet Surrey articulates some of the movement in the development of understanding of the locus of being and change when tracking development. She and the other core RCT theorists are consistently attempting to rearticulate and reconceptualize the traditional understanding of self-structure as a "unit," and therefore the celebration of differentiation as the primary developmental task. This is useful as a corrective to understanding independence and achievement of autonomy as the goal of development, and instead looking at the qualities that promote interdependence as psychologically valuable and a mark of developmental maturity. Surrey writes:

Today I would question the idea of a self-structure and would replace it with *process* as a better way to describe psychological growth. The capacity for flexibility, responsiveness, adaptation, receptivity, creativity, activity, and change through connection suggests open, evolving and not closed, contained psyches... Thus, I have moved from *self* to *self-in-relation* to the *movement of relation*. *Connection* has replaced *self* as the core element or the locus of creative energy development.¹¹⁸

Pathology is not denied in RCT, but it is redefined and relocated. Rather than understanding pathology as a distortion of the development within the self-structure, health is understood as

¹¹⁷ Jordan and Walker, Introduction.

¹¹⁸ Janet L. Surrey et al. *Empathy Revisited*. Work in Progress, no. 40 (Wellesley, MA: The Stone Center, 1990), 3.

movement in relationship predicated on mutuality in relationship, and pathology is understood as inauthenticity in relationship that inhibits movement and relational growth. Jordan thinks about relational images as our “unconscious framework by which we determine who we are, what we can do and how worthwhile we are.” These images form our beliefs about what happens in relationship, and they are formed in our early relationships, through which we explain to ourselves why things are the way they are. It is from these images that we develop beliefs about how people act in relationship, and these images also have a strong formative influence on our development of our sense of self.¹¹⁹ To reform these images and thereby reform our sense of self and understanding of relationship means to address power and mutuality on multiple personal and political levels simultaneously.

In her book *Relational-Cultural Therapy*, Judith Jordan succinctly identifies the seven core concepts of Relational Cultural Theory. The seven goals of the theory are aligned with the intended outcomes of the practice of therapy, which Jordan identifies as the “five good-things.” The five good things are attributes of a growth-fostering relationship—a relationship in which relational development and perhaps healing is happening for all parties involved.

These core concepts and goals point toward the most significant features of RCT. After reading the Stone Center working papers as well as the more recent books on RCT, I would identify its most salient and salutogenic features as: the importance of mutuality, empathy, authenticity, and the care for growth for everyone involved in relationship.

¹¹⁹ Jordan, *Relational-Cultural Therapy*, 107.

Empathy

Empathy is a complex concept and must be treated as such. However, to understand the function of RCT is to understand the complexity of empathy as well as to rethink how empathy functions in relationship. In some of her early work on empathy and its centrality to doing therapeutic work from a relational perspective, Jordan addressed the challenge of understanding connection as something that does not denote a regression to immaturity. She does significant work in redefining the understanding of connection that is built through empathy. In her work, “Empathy and Self Boundaries,” Jordan claims that relational issues have too often been phrased in regressive language (i.e. merged, undifferentiated, etc.) and that, in order for the relational aspect of self definition to be adequately understood, there needs to be a more complex understanding of connection and intimacy.¹²⁰ This is an exceptionally important point if one is to put connection at the center of healing based on a developmental understanding that values connection and all that connection is predicated upon, namely attunement to another’s well-being while remaining attuned to one’s self. It is not enough to value and give attention to the relationship—or even to purport that change happens within the relationship. *What Jordan is pointing toward here is that it is the quality of the relationship, measured fundamentally in mutuality, that contributes to movement in relationship and in each individual who participates in the relationship.*

Jordan contends that empathy is central to understanding the aspect of self that transcends the *disconnected* self.¹²¹ She writes, “Without empathy, there is no intimacy, no real attainment

¹²⁰ Judith V. Jordan and Stone Center for Developmental Services and Studies, “*Empathy and Self Boundaries*,” Work in Progress. no. 16 (Wellesley, MA: The Stone Center, 1985), 2.

¹²¹ Jordan, “Empathy and Self Boundaries,” 2.

of an appreciation of the paradox of separateness within connection.”¹²² She explains that empathy is not a nebulous “contagion-like” unknowable state; rather in fact it is a complex process that is predicated on the presence of ego strength and strong ego development and is a complex process that involves both affective and cognitive elements.

Alexandra Kaplan provides another helpful definition that illustrates the centrality of empathy to the practice of RCT, as well as the similarities and differences that the conception and construction of empathy in RCT has with other understanding of empathy. She writes:

Optimally, empathy is a quality of relational flow, a mutual exchange in which each shares, absorbs, reflects upon, and enhances her own and the other’s experience, and the relationship itself. Participation in such relational flow requires affective attunement to the other, the ability to absorb the other’s experience without losing your own, the balance of affective and cognitive components, and comfort within a relational context of mutual understanding. It requires, in sum, the capacity to join in the creation of a synergistic process which transcends the experience of the individuals involved and moves toward a shared sense of enhanced meaning, clarity and enrichment.¹²³

When RCT theorists are discussing mutual empathy, they are talking about relationships in which everyone’s worth is communicated through the relational practice of being open to affecting and being affected by another person—Jordan highlights the necessity of supported vulnerability to transformation in relationship achieved through mutual empathy when she writes, “The growth that occurs [through mutual empathy] is both affective and cognitive and leads to an enlarged sense of community. Supported vulnerability, a feeling that one’s vulnerability will not be taken advantage of is necessary for mutual empathy.”¹²⁴

¹²² Jordan, “Empathy and Self Boundaries,” 2.

¹²³ Janet L. Surrey et al. *Empathy Revisited*, 6.

¹²⁴ Jordan, *Relational-Cultural Therapy*, 104.

RCT theorists propose that the “*development of mutually empathetic relationships*,” is the goal of development rather than the movement toward autonomy.¹²⁵ In her paper, “Relational Development: Therapeutic Implications of Empathy and Shame,” Judith Jordan does an excellent job of locating the psychological and emotional issues that either promote or inhibit connection in a socio-political context. Not all relationships are equal, nor are all relationships healthy or safe, and so relationship itself should never be naively promoted as salutogenic or promoting the common good. RCT theorists are interested in the factors that make relationships growth fostering. In relationships that enhance growth, there is an element of people taking responsibility together for the relationship and for the growth of all parties in the relationship. Mutual responsibility for the relationship is one important manifestation of the significance of mutuality in the relationship.

Jordan examines the ways in which authenticity, mutuality, trust, and empathy promote relationship in which healing can happen, and she also examines shame and narcissism as they interfere with the capacity to enter more fully into relationship.¹²⁶ *The key here is the capacity to be vulnerable. Jordan highlights the concept and practice of “supported vulnerability.” If a person can experience vulnerability within a safe relationship, then safety can reside in the connectedness.*¹²⁷

One of the important things to understand in terms of achieving mutuality in relationship is that we do this in the midst of imperfection, uncertainty and suffering. It means that we reject the idea that we are moving toward some perfected form of self-sufficiency, and instead live together with the limitations of finitude. Jordan believes that the

¹²⁵ Surrey, *Empathy Revisited*, 3.

¹²⁶ Jordan. *Relational Development*, 3.

¹²⁷ Jordan, *Relational Development*, 3.

recognition of these limitations can give us the humility necessary to live into our humanity and interdependence on one another.¹²⁸

When Jordan addresses empathy as functioning within the therapeutic relationship, she emphasizes the *joining aspect* of empathy—something she claims is overlooked in other modes of therapy in which empathy is understood as significant.¹²⁹ Jordan emphasizes the complex nature of empathy when she writes, “It is the paradox of empathy that we appreciate the unique, differentiated characteristics of this particular other person, and we move past the particular to join in a place of commonality.”¹³⁰ This was particularly useful in terms of thinking about the ways in which people who have experienced long periods of incarceration, and those who have not, can reach across that experiential divide to build transformative relationship. Although most people who have not experienced incarceration cannot understand or know much of the experience from that context, it is possible that they could join with those who have and, particularly in the context of Christian community and narrative, in our common concern for such things in life as the common good, forgiveness, redemption, and more. In fact, there is an opportunity here for those who have not experienced incarceration to connect with and draw from our own experiences of pain, disconnection, trauma, abuse, or living under conditions of structures in which exploitive power of unjust individuals and systems affects our well-being. This opportunity allows us to join with those who have lived in long term incarceration in their experience of resilience in the face of trauma, neglect and abuse. Achieving mutual empathy means that all people in the relationship can recognize themselves in the other and also the other

¹²⁸ Jordan, *Relational Development*, 4.

¹²⁹ Jordan, *Relational Development*, 5.

¹³⁰ Jordan, *Relational Development*, 4.

in themselves. To understand mutual empathy means to recognize that connecting around difference is challenging and promotes growth, and that there is also significance to connecting through resonance.¹³¹

Impediments to Connection and Growth Fostering Relationship

If we are going to structure an intentional Christian community around being in intentional relationship to foster resilience and transformation, it is important to also identify what individual and socio-cultural traits detract from building growth-fostering relationships. Judith Jordon identifies two strong impediments to interpersonal connection. She discusses how shame and narcissism impede or at least constrain the ability to connect—they therefore put limits on the healing and transformative work that can happen within relationship.

Shame is relatively universal—although different in scope and intensity for different people. It may at first seem strange that she devotes so much attention to one identified characterological disorder, Narcissism. However, I would suggest that her attention to this makes sense if we think about narcissism as the condition of our age, as pastoral theologian Donald Capps suggests in his work, *The Depleted Self: Sin in a Narcissistic Age*. In fact, in this book, Capps argues that our way of dealing with sin is ineffective particularly because at the heart of narcissistic injury is shame not guilt, and confession does not treat shame—rather it functions to mitigate guilt over things done (or not done), not of a state of being.¹³² He contends that since narcissism, and therefore shame, is characteristic of our age, then the church needs to

¹³¹ Jordan, *Relational Development*, 5.

¹³² Donald Capps. *The Depleted Self: Sin in a Narcissistic Age* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993).

address shame in order to help heal those who come to church for healing. So, returning to Jordan's work and thinking about the impediments of shame and narcissism to relational competency, we can think about these things as related and as characteristic of not only a personal but also a cultural nature.

In articulating how narcissism affects the way in which people can form connections and therefore be in growth-producing relationships, Jordan summarizes Kohut's belief that clinical narcissism develops from a lack of admiring self-objects that results in a deficit within the individual. This deficit leads to the unconscious need for constant mirroring paired with the unconscious anxiety about being dependent on another for validation. All of this results in difficulty regulating self-esteem and therefore the constant need to feel special.¹³³ Jordan argues that it is not the narcissistic person's (and I think here we can also talk about traits rather than solely a clinically diagnosable personality disorder) need to feel special that is the most damaging for the person, *but the difficulty in letting others really have an impact on the narcissist*. This difficulty being responsive to others impedes their ability to use their relationships to develop a sense of well-being. *She posits that the narcissistic person's search for adulation is actually an attempt to find a sense of connection*. Taking pleasure in the growth of another is absent for the one who struggles with narcissistic issues. Jordan sums up the ways in which narcissistic issues impede relational healing in the following way:

Real responsiveness, mutuality, and the creation of something new and spontaneous together are not possible. The other person cannot be allowed to be genuinely responsive because the response may not contribute to one's image, and one cannot respond freely because that admits the possibility of being affected by the other. Dominance and control become an essential strategy in narcissistically distorted relationships, and vitality is drained from the connection, contributing to the inevitable interpersonal boredom and the

¹³³ Jordan, *Relational Development*, 5.

quest for newness and excitement. Using the metaphor of voice, the dialogue has become imbalanced, with little energy devoted to real listening.¹³⁴

Whereas Jordan believes that in narcissism there is a diminished capacity to be responsive to another, and that interpersonal conflicts lead to narcissistic rage, she believes that shame is primarily a felt sense of unworthiness to be in connection.¹³⁵ *Both shame and narcissism are concerned with empathetic failures.* Jordan writes that for the person experiencing shame:

There is a loss of the sense of *empathetic possibility*, others are not experienced as empathetic, and the capacity for self-empathy is lost. One feels unworthy of love, not because of some discrete action which would be the cause for guilt, but because one is defective or flawed in some essential way.¹³⁶

In her treatment of shame, and the way that shame distorts and disrupts relationship and relational healing, Jordan again demonstrates how the personal is political. Jordan lifts up the way that shame functions to silence the one experiencing shame. She demonstrates that shaming is a powerful, if subtle and indirect, method of domination and control over certain expressions of truth.¹³⁷ The result is people, who have identities that are non-dominant (people of color, women, LGBTQI, etc.), are told that their experiences are deviant, reinforcing the way in which reality is defined by making the socially dominant group's experience the normative experience. Given this cultural dynamic, part of working at relationship with someone who is not in this dominant group is *affirming that their reality does make sense given the context of their situation.*¹³⁸ Being in relationship with previously incarcerated women means listening to their

¹³⁴ Jordan, *Relational Development*, 5.

¹³⁵ Jordan, *Relational Development*, 6.

¹³⁶ Jordan, *Relational Development*, 6.

¹³⁷ Jordan, *Relational Development*, 7.

¹³⁸ Jordan, *Relational Development*, 8.

voices and their struggles. A necessary aspect of healing will be to honor the parts of their identities informed by the painful experiences they have had both before and during incarceration. The hope is that through relationship in which supported vulnerability leads to mutual empathy—one in which each relationship partner is held in a reliable, trustworthy, safe relationship--each person is able to bring the aspects of herself that she has felt shame about back into relationship.

The Integration of Cultural Conditions and Relational Healing

One of the most significant strengths of Relational Cultural Theory is the articulation of the effect of the external context's (culture) relationship to the internal experience and of course implicitly the effect this has on the ability to be in growth-producing relationships. Maureen Walker looks at the challenges and possibilities of developing relational competence between people of different races.¹³⁹ She begins by acknowledging that racism manifests itself in much more insidious ways than the blatant acting out that we witness. She writes, "Frequently, and also more insidiously, it is present in the inability to represent oneself with authenticity across racial differences and in the resistance to make more of oneself available for growth and change within the context of cross-racial relationships."¹⁴⁰

Walker goes on to say that we are mistaken when we focus on and regret that there are relational disconnections that come out of racial difference. It is not the differences that cause

¹³⁹ Maureen Walker, "Race, Self and Society: Relational Challenges in a Culture of Disconnection," in *The Complexity of Connection: Writings from the Stone Center's Jean Baker Miller Training Institute*, eds. Judith Jordon, Maureen Walker and Linda M. Hartling (New York: The Guilford Press, 2004), 91.

¹⁴⁰ Walker, "Race, Self and Society," 92.

the disconnection; it is that the differences are “*profoundly stratified.*” This stratification is the result of the cultural indoctrination in which we have all been immersed that tells us that white is superior to being a person of color. Walker asserts that it is the stratification rather than the difference that constrains our ability to be authentically with one another and weakens our desire for connection. In order to demonstrate on the very fundamental level how this is functioning and how the external contexts impact our self-understanding, she writes, “This stratification distorts our answers to the questions: “Who am I? Who is this other person? Who are we together?”¹⁴¹ This kind of stratification is therefore going to distort the images we develop of ourselves, of others and the relational images that we have and and that we believe to be possible.

Walker asks how, given this stratification that is infused with power and distortions, do we move from a culture of disconnection into a culture where hope and reconciliation is possible? She believes that healing is only possible when we are able to make ourselves available to the experience of conflict with all of its challenges and complexities.¹⁴²

However, Jordan and Walker also note that our psychological defenses, such as projection and denial, function on a political and cultural level as well. They propose that dominant groups deny the large parts of their experience that they find undesirable and project those qualities onto groups with less power. This is clearly harmful to those with less power, but it is also harmful for the people in the more powerful groups because as Walker writes: “They

¹⁴¹ Walker, “Race, Self and Society,” 93.

¹⁴² Walker, “Race, Self and Society,” 101.

never take the opportunity to grow and come into a fuller humanity by owning these parts of themselves.”¹⁴³

Given the way that culturally controlling images tell us what to expect from ourselves and others and are salient in our development of our relational images, Walker claims that one important way to relational cultural healing is to shift diversity training from a primary focus in changing behavior to a primary focus on how everybody needs to be open to movement.¹⁴⁴ For this project, this is most significant when we think in terms of intersectionality of identity. The concept of intersectionality was first introduced in the area of critical race theory by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw. Since its inception, the concept of intersectionality has been used in various ways, “scholars and activists have broadened intersectionality to engage a range of issues, social identities, power dynamics, legal and political systems, and discursive structures in the United States and beyond.”¹⁴⁵ Although three out of the four women I interviewed for this project were white, and identified racially as Caucasian, they all carry with them an aspect of their identity that is “ex-felon” or previously incarcerated woman. Further, many of the clients that I saw for pastoral counseling were women of color and so faced multiple aspects of their identity that were vulnerable to the projection of others with more social power. Every woman who has been previously incarcerated for decades needs to negotiate the prison label as a part of her identity.

¹⁴³ Maureen Walker and Jean Baker Miller, “Racial Images and Relational Possibilities,” in *The Complexity of Connection: Writings from the Stone Center's Jean Baker Miller Training Institute*, eds. Judith V. Jordan, Linda M. Hartling and Maureen Walker (New York: Guilford Press, 2004), 134.

¹⁴⁴ Walker, “Racial Images,” 140.

¹⁴⁵ Devon W. Carbado, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, Vickie M. Mays and Barbara Tomlinson, “Intersectionality: Mapping the Movements of a Theory,” *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 10, no. 2 (2013): 304.

The previously incarcerated, like others who experience disenfranchisement due to race, gender, sexuality, or other aspects of their identity, must face the projection of negativity upon themselves from people in more powerful and privileged positions given their cultural and social location.

Possibilities for Transformation through Relationship

Using the work of Winnicott, Ulanov and RCT theorists, we can identify some patterns in relationship of which to be aware, and we can also form some standards for developing intentional community that is built upon growth-fostering relationships. One of the foundational elements of Winnicott's work that makes him particularly suitable for thinking through Christian faith and identity is his commitment not to resolve paradox. To understand Jesus, to be a disciple of Christ is to accept strength in weakness, life out of death, and compassion as power.

Winnicott's understanding of the damage caused by living in situations requiring extreme compliance has particular salience to creating community with returning citizens. In both my interviews with my research partners and in the counseling I did with returning citizens, I heard time and again about the power of resistance to the conditions of forced compliance. At times, it cost people a great deal on the surface, and they would wonder why they chose those behaviors when they knew they would be punished for them under conditions of incarceration and post incarceration. When I suggested that perhaps there was something more important to them that they were protecting or expressing with the behavior than the external rewards, this almost always made sense. I heard examples of the joy of rebellion against forced compliance in Laurel's interview. She talked about how she now likes to stand on the sidewalk and dance in the elevators because things like this were so tightly controlled for in prison.

Another of Winnicott's foundational assertions is that we create in relationship space for one another. This is essential to understand in building community in which we work for transformation. The ability to know that we are succeeding in our goals when we are considering the needs of the other, and holding space for their needs to be met. When Winnicott speaks of creating space in which another can rest before growth will occur, we can think of sanctuary. What does it mean to have a space in which people experience enough support to risk growth? The Christian conviction that God wants us to know and experience the ways in which God created us supports Winnicott's assertion that, in order to do this, we must trust the holding that we receive enough to relax—we must be able to rely on others who are both attuned and responsive to our needs—this will be other people in the community, but ultimately this will be God who through the Holy Spirit calls the community into being.

Ulanov's primary contribution to this project is her ability to take her deep understanding and engagement of Winnicott's concepts and theories and help us make the transition from the parallels he articulated between the home and clinical context to the communal Christian context. One of her most significant contributions is her articulation of the centrality of dependence to those desiring to be in Christian community. The kind of radical dependence she articulates above that is central to developing a life with God and in Christian community and can be correlated with the work of Jordan and her colleagues that articulate the importance of supported vulnerability and mutuality in relationship as essential for relational growth.

There are three elements of the RCT theorists that make their work relevant to this project. The first is that they are self-consciously decentering male normativity as the standard of emotional and social well-being. This project does the same in that it focuses on and seeks to learn from women's experience of incarceration and post-incarceration development and well-

being. Second, RCT consistently moves from the interpersonal to the socio-cultural and back again. They demonstrate in their thinking and theories how inseparable our understanding of ourselves in relationship with one another is from the ways in which we experience different groups in society. This is particularly helpful to this project in that we are considering the lived experience of women who spent decades of their lives in prison before returning to society at large. It is essential for all people who are involved with returning citizens (including the returning citizens themselves) to recognize that those in positions of privilege tend to use a form of psychological projection to distance negative and intolerable aspects of self onto populations with less power and privilege. A whole dissertation could be written on that topic alone! I cannot overstate how many of my clients struggled with this often unnamed dynamic, and it is also present throughout the words of my research partners represented in Chapter 2. The other essential recognition that RCT brings to this work is that it is not the difference between people coming together in community, it is the (historical and contemporary) stratification of the difference between groups of people that create tensions and relational problems. The RCT theorists speak of this in terms of race and, without minimizing that reality, we do need to expand the complexity of it when we consider intersectionality of identity. One of the questions I asked my research partners in their interviews was how they identify racially and culturally. Laurel responded that she identified racially as “white,” and culturally as a “formerly incarcerated woman.”

Conclusion

The RCT theorists in this chapter help us to identify growth-fostering and growth-impeding elements in relationship and to examine how what happens interpersonally is informed

by, and formative of, social-cultural structures. Using Winnicott's understanding of when relationships meet the criteria of being attuned and responsive (which in adults and older children means having mutual empathy in RCT terms), we can apply the elements of RCT effectively to set intentions for what kind of relationships we are committed to building between returning citizens and other people in community focused on transformation. The combination of Winnicott and RCT helps us to remember that imperfection is the goal, and that messiness in relationship is expected. At the same time there are guiding standards for growth fostering relationships. Having a way to name, speak about and contend with impediments to growth fostering relationships has implications both interpersonally and culturally.

Chapter Six

Theological Reflection: Atonement and Redemption

Introduction

In Christianity, the doctrine of the atonement is central to the development of both personal and communal understanding of who God is, who Christ is, and therefore who we are as followers of Christ. Therefore, the doctrine of the atonement is essential to identity—both communal and personal. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* gives the following definition for the concept of atonement in the Christian religion: Atonement is “in Christian theology, the reconciliation of humanity with God through the sacrificial death of Christ.”¹⁴⁶ However, even though this is succinct, it is then immediately problematized as to how this is achieved. The entry in the dictionary then concisely lays out the many different and competing theories (ie. Death of Christ as ransom paid to Satan, God the Son taking on human nature, and by so doing transforming it, Christ as our representative—not substitute, gives satisfaction to God for sin—sin as debt, Jesus dies in our place, etc.)¹⁴⁷ Similarly in her essay, “Atonement and the Christian Life: Reformed Doctrine from a Christian Perspective,” Dr. Nancy J. Duff articulates the challenge of even offering a working definition of the doctrine of the atonement. She writes, “One problem in evaluating the intention and integrity of the church’s confession regarding the atonement is that no one interpretation has achieved the status of official dogma. Scholars cannot even agree on how to classify the different interpretations of the

¹⁴⁶ Elizabeth A. Livingstone, ‘Atonement,’ *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. Oxford Paperback Reference (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), accessed February 7, 2017, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199659623.001.0001/acref-9780199659623>.

¹⁴⁷ Livingstone, “Atonement.”

atonement.”¹⁴⁸ Further, I have served churches through both non-ordained and ordained ministry for over ten years, and my experience has been that most congregants cannot articulate what they believe about the atonement, much less delineate the theories that have been inherited or claim any intentionality about selecting one over another.

In order to develop an understanding of how psychology, theology and the lived experience of women living post incarceration and Christian community can mutually benefit from developing intentional relational practices, it is critical to develop an understanding of what we mean by atonement, redemption, and salvation. Further, because this project is putting women’s experience at its center, and making normative the experience of women who are returning citizens, we need to examine how the doctrine of the atonement is understood in mainline Christian congregations, how Christian notions of atonement function in a culture where there is stratification power differentials along the lines of race and gender, and also how the inherited understanding of atonement is integrated into the legal system of this country.

For this project, including an analysis of the doctrine of the atonement is essential for at least three reasons. First, as noted in the chapter on mass incarceration, the doctrine of atonement influences the justice system in this country concerning the way we conceptualize justice as retributive or restorative. Second, an understanding of redemption and sin needs to be bridged in the creation of an intentional Christian community, because as Laurel articulated in her interview, for the most part women who are returning citizens do not need to be convinced of their sinfulness but do need to reckon with redemption. Conversely, liberal Christians generally do not like to think in terms of sinfulness, and therefore do not have a deliberative theology of redemption and atonement. Third, if we accept Darby Ray’s assertion that, “within the corpus of Christian theology, it is precisely the doctrine of atonement whose job it is to reflect on the

¹⁴⁸ N. J. Duff, "Atonement and the Christian Life: Reformed Doctrine from a Feminist Perspective," *Interpretation* 53, no. 1 (1999): 23, accessed February 15, 2017, doi:10.1177/002096439905300103.

reality and tenacity of human evil and to attempt to articulate how it is that God offers a salvific alternative to this evil,” then we need to engage this doctrine intentionally in the community we are proposing in order to articulate and transform interwoven social forces through which power is misused to maintain stratification and disenfranchisement.¹⁴⁹ In order to illustrate the challenge of defining the doctrine of atonement which in some sense drives our legal system, in this chapter I attempt to lay out and briefly evaluate the most predominant theories side by side before introducing critique and consequences of accepting one or more theories into our cultural sense of justice as retributive or reconciliatory.

Through examining the four major theories of the atonement, the “atonement orthodoxy” as articulated by Darby Ray, power analyses of the doctrine of the atonement by womanist and feminist theologians, and reinterpretations of the redemptive and salvific work of Christ on our behalf by a number of theologians, this chapter aims to develop a rich description of how the doctrine of the atonement, as ethos, functions within our lives, churches, legal system and culture. Putting an understanding of the doctrine of the Atonement as the theological center of this project allows us to use the analysis generated in this chapter in correlation with the lived experience reported by the research partners to produce constructive propositions for an intentional Christian community that addresses the spiritual, social and relational needs of returning citizens in light of the current systems that are generated by the phenomenon of mass incarceration in the United States. At the heart of this project about incarceration and return are notions about how we experience rupture and repair—hope and healing—trauma and grace in relationship with one another.

¹⁴⁹ Darby Kathleen Ray, “A Praxis of Atonement: Confounding Evil Through Cunning and Compassion.” *Religious Studies and Theology* 18, no. 1 (1999): 34.

Notions of Atonement and Images of Justice in an Era of Mass Incarceration

How we think about atonement has significant influence on how we make public policy concerning incarceration. The development of criminal law and theological precepts about how we understand sin and salvation have never been independent of one another. In his work, *God's Just Vengeance*, Timothy Gorringer demonstrates the interrelated way that the development of criminal law and Anselm's satisfaction theory impacted one another. He writes:

In fact, satisfaction theory emerged, in the eleventh century, at exactly the same time as criminal law took shape. The two reacted upon each other. Theology drew on legal notions and legal discussion, as the history of satisfaction doctrine makes clear, and law turned to theology for metaphysical justification.¹⁵⁰

Gorringer argues that the satisfaction theory of the atonement “provided one of the subtlest and most profound” rationalizations for justice that is retributive.¹⁵¹

In her work, “Mass Incarceration and Theological Images of Justice,” Kathryn Getek Soltis analyzes the ways that understanding—and more to the point common cultural misunderstanding—of two key theological precepts function to support mass incarceration and the high incurrence of collateral consequences for returning citizens in the United States. In this work, Soltis begins by examining the cultural appropriation of *lex talionis* (an eye for an eye) and Anselm's satisfaction theory of the Atonement. She then acknowledges the collateral consequences of mass incarceration and argues against an overtly individualistic image of justice that drives retributive rather than restorative justice in the United States.¹⁵² Her work is helpful

¹⁵⁰ Timothy Gorringer, *God's Just Vengeance: Crime, Violence, and the Rhetoric of Salvation*, Cambridge Studies in Ideology and Religion, no. 9 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 22.

¹⁵¹ Gorringer, *God's Just Vengeance*, 12.

¹⁵² Kathryn Getek Soltis, “Mass Incarceration and Theological Images of Justice,” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 31, no. 2 (2011): 115.

to this project primarily for two reasons. First, she demonstrates how the misunderstanding of Anselm's Satisfaction Theory fuels our cultural sense of how relational violation should be dealt with. Second, Soltis demonstrates how our current system of justice underestimates the relational aspect of punishment. Solis initially argues that a theology of satisfaction supports two beliefs relevant to both the conception of punishment and incarceration. The first is that suffering is of primary importance in paying for one's crime, and second that there is an obligation to punish someone who has transgressed.¹⁵³ She argues that this move toward retributive justice is similar to the cultural understanding and use of *lex talionis*, but that the satisfaction theory makes a shift toward law and order in general and away from retribution between individuals. She points out that theologically this shift underlines the notion that every transgression is an offence against God and not just the other person who was harmed. Interestingly, Solis goes on to say that, although Anselm's theological understanding of the atonement has long been considered a vehicle for thinking about punishment in terms of retribution, recent scholarship argues that this common belief misinterprets key portions of his theology.¹⁵⁴

Soltis points out that, in Anselm's theory of the atoning work of Christ, God chooses satisfaction *rather* than punishment. God does not require our suffering, but rather it is our obedience that satisfies God. We are at one with God when we work for God's order, vision and intention for the world—in short when we work for a just world.¹⁵⁵ However, although Anselm

¹⁵³ Soltis, "Mass Incarceration," 117.

¹⁵⁴ Soltis, "Mass Incarceration," 117.

¹⁵⁵ Soltis, "Mass Incarceration," 118.

proposes satisfaction as a substitution for punishment, soon this theory became understood in a way that made vicarious sacrifice the way to satisfy God's wrath. Soltis writes, "The theory of satisfaction may be exploited to claim that punishment is obligatory and suffering is necessary. These, in fact, are all versions of arguments that have been used to justify the US penal system, especially the shift toward tough-on-crime sentencing policy."¹⁵⁶ However, the most compelling part of her work is how she demonstrates that, correctly understood, Anselm's satisfaction theory can help move us as a society from retributive to restorative forms of justice. She points out that in Anselm's theory it is not the suffering but the work toward restoration of right order that is satisfying to God. She writes, "Both Anselm and the *lex talionis* can mediate between restoration and retribution, which suggests that punishment and compensation are legitimate so long as they are directed toward the retrieval of relationships and the realization of original purposes."¹⁵⁷

In our current situation of mass incarceration, we do not have an adequate balance of restoration and retribution. This is perhaps demonstrated nowhere more clearly than in the collateral consequences waiting for returning citizens once they have been released from incarceration. I will not discuss collateral consequences at length here as I have done this in earlier chapters, but suffice it to say that, when returning citizens are not welcomed back into full citizenship following a period of incarceration but rather continue to be penalized for past behavior, it is not much of a reach to argue that through a theological lens they are not welcomed back into full humanity either. Not only have Soltis and other scholars noted the confluence of public policy and general acceptance of theological precepts (accurate or otherwise), but even

¹⁵⁶ Soltis, "Mass Incarceration," 119.

¹⁵⁷ Soltis, "Mass Incarceration," 119.

written into the founding and constitutive documents of the United States we hear the unmistakable convergence of the rights of citizenship with human dignity. Early in the text of the Declaration of Independence we hear these words: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”¹⁵⁸

Four Major Theories of Atonement—Strengths and Weaknesses

In order to examine why and how the Christian notion of the Atonement functions in our culture and affects the ways in which we understand ourselves, others, transgressions, forgiveness and notions of power, it is important to first at least briefly outline the four major theories of the Atonement. The theories that I will discuss in this section are known as the Satisfaction Theory, Moral Influence Theory, Penal Substitution Theory and the Ransom Theory.

The Satisfaction Theory is associated with medieval monk and theologian Anselm of Canterbury, and his work *Cur Deus Homo?* The Satisfaction Theory is also referred to as the Objective theory of the atonement since God is the object of Christ’s atoning work.¹⁵⁹ It is grounded in biblical passages, such as Isaiah 53 and Galatians 3:13 that suggest that vicarious suffering is the way by which humankind is redeemed.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ Thomas Jefferson, "The Declaration of Independence," *Historic American Documents*, Lit2Go Edition, (1776), accessed March 14, 2017, <http://etc.usf.edu/lit2go/133/historic-american-documents/4957/the-declaration-of-independence/>.

¹⁵⁹ Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*. 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2004), Kindle, chap. 8.

¹⁶⁰ Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, chap. 8.

This theory comes out of the Medieval context and represents Medieval thinking. God and humans are in relationship as feudal lords are to serfs. In the relationship between lord and serf, disobedience dishonors the lord. Therefore, “either satisfaction must be given or punishment must follow.”¹⁶¹ The satisfaction due God is infinite because of the offence of sin. Humanity must provide satisfaction—but only God is able to provide satisfaction.¹⁶² “[It is] for this reason God has become human in Christ. In Jesus’ perfect obedience unto death, satisfaction is rendered, justice is done, God’s honor is restored and sinners are forgiven.”¹⁶³

This theory has both strengths and weaknesses. A primary strength of this theory is that it affirms that human evil is deadly, and that sin creates a break in our relationship with God so that we forget that our relationships to God is one in which we are dependent upon our Creator. The major weakness of this theory is that mercy and justice are in conflict.¹⁶⁴ Grace becomes conditional on God’s satisfaction, and the question is: If grace is conditional, can it still be considered grace?¹⁶⁵

The Moral Influence Theory is associated with Peter Abelard—a contemporary of Anselm. In The Moral Influence Theory, also called the Subjective theory (as opposed to Anselm’s Objective theory), the change that takes place happens in humans rather than in God.¹⁶⁶ In this theory, Christ demonstrates God’s love in a way that is so compelling that we are

¹⁶¹ Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, chap. 8.

¹⁶² Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, chap. 8.

¹⁶³ Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, chap. 8.

¹⁶⁴ Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, chap. 8.

¹⁶⁵ Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, chap. 8.

¹⁶⁶ Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, chap. 8.

obliged to respond with gratitude.¹⁶⁷ The atoning work of Christ remains incomplete until it is taken into the act of faith and through faith enacts the transformation of one's life.¹⁶⁸ The love of God in Christ is a gift that produces a response of love in humanity. The love of Christ is different than human love and in this way it is mysterious in its ability to compel a loving response.¹⁶⁹ Therefore, God's love through Christ is a revelation of God and also an example to us, but the atonement it effects in the person is beyond being an example to us of how to love.¹⁷⁰

The strengths of this theory are that it highlights the unconditional power of God's love and God's love as a transforming agent in our lives. It also underscores the significance of human responsiveness to the love of God in Christ.¹⁷¹ It highlights the continuity between the life and work of Jesus and his death. A potential weaknesses of this theory is that it underestimates the influence and persistence of evil enacted in the world, and connected to that there is a sentimentalizing of the love of God.¹⁷²

The Penal Substitution Theory is attributed to Calvin, and comes from Institutes of the Christian Religion, Book II, Section 16.5. This theory represents sixteenth and seventeenth century thought concerning the death of Christ. In the penal substitution theory, satisfaction ensues from punishment (not the lack of satisfaction resulting in punishment as in

¹⁶⁷ Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, chap. 8.

¹⁶⁸ Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, chap. 8.

¹⁶⁹ Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, chap. 8.

¹⁷⁰ Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, chap. 8.

¹⁷¹ Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, chap. 8.

¹⁷² Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, chap. 8.

Anselm's theory).¹⁷³ Calvin contended that God is a righteous judge, and therefore God does not let God's law be broken without punishment. In his atoning work, Christ stood in the place of sinners, and the burden of our sin and guilt was transferred to him. We are pardoned from all guilt, because the sins we committed are now Christ's. Christ dies the spiritual and physical death that we deserve, because he made himself to be a sinner in our place. This death caused intense suffering for him.¹⁷⁴ Through the death of Jesus, God's wrath was satisfied, and God was made gracious toward us.

The strength of this theory is similar to the strength of the satisfaction theory in that it demonstrates the seriousness sin. It affirms that the outcome of sin is death, and it highlights our inability to be in relationship with God without Christ. However, the major difficulty with this theory is significant. The most important challenge is contending with God's grace. If God was not gracious toward us until the death of Christ, why would God send Christ to die in our place?

The Ransom Model of the Atonement is the fourth major theory that we will discuss. This theory is also sometimes referred to as the patristic model or the "Classic" model of atonement. It is a series of images that is first given systematic treatment in the book *Christus Victor* by Gustaf Aulen. The core narrative that illustrates atonement in terms of conflict and victory was particularly popular between the second and sixth centuries.¹⁷⁵ The event of the atonement is portrayed as the struggle between the liberator—the one who sets free—and the devil--the one who enslaves. God defeats the powers of evil that keep God and humanity apart,

¹⁷³ Darby Kathleen Ray, *Deceiving the Devil: Atonement, Abuse, and Ransom* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1998), 11.

¹⁷⁴ Ray, *Deceiving the Devil*, 11.

¹⁷⁵ Ray, *Deceiving the Devil*, 119.

and so God and humanity are reconciled to one another. It is both in the life and death of Jesus as the incarnation of God that the powers of evil are defeated and humanity is liberated from bondage to them.¹⁷⁶ Therefore, the dominant image of this model is liberation from bondage; this comes about through the battle between good and evil, and the atonement is the process by which we are freed from bondage as good triumphs over evil.¹⁷⁷

The two central ideas that are used to explain the way in which God, humanity and evil are in relationship with one another are the concepts of deception and ransom.¹⁷⁸ Christ's life is the ransom paid to the devil in order to free human beings from our bondage to evil. Because of original sin, the devil had certain rights and a claim over human beings. Because God is just, God could not ignore these rights. Because the devil had this right over humanity, we were subject to death rather than eternal life.

Salvation, according to this model, is liberation from captivity that was effected by Christ's life, understood as a ransom paid to the devil in order to free humans from bondage to evil.¹⁷⁹ However, Jesus was without sin, and so the devil had no legitimate right to him, and he was not subject to death. Therefore, by killing Jesus, the devil overreached and misused his power. Due to this mistake made out of arrogance, the devil had to forfeit his claim to those who came after Christ. Humanity was liberated from bondage because of the natural consequences of evil acting as evil does—with greed and arrogance. Through the incarnation, God tricked the devil into thinking Jesus was a human being like all others—and therefore subject to death. "This

¹⁷⁶ Ray, *Deceiving the Devil*, 119-120.

¹⁷⁷ Ray, *Deceiving the Devil*, 120.

¹⁷⁸ Ray, *Deceiving the Devil*, 120.

¹⁷⁹ Ray, *Deceiving the Devil*, 120.

is how Christ was triumphant at the moment of his defeat on the cross and how the devil was defeated just when he seemed to be at his most triumphant.”¹⁸⁰ Darby Ray finds in this model a relational theological trend in which evil is overcome by justice rather than coercive power. She believes this model demonstrates “saving grace and redemptive resistance” in the life and death of Jesus.¹⁸¹

In her book *Deceiving the Devil*, Darby Ray articulates well both the strengths and weaknesses of this model. One problematic aspect of this model is that it propounds a dualistic framework for understanding evil and good. The distinction between good and evil, God and the devil, are clear cut, and this leads to a universe that is understood by a rigid moral framework.¹⁸² Secondly, this model tends to depict redemption as a purely cosmic affair, an otherworldly fight from which God emerges triumphant, securing humanity’s liberation from Satan without the participation, or even knowledge, of human beings.¹⁸³ Finally, this model portrays atonement as completely done, and it presents the work of Christ as resulting in the complete and comprehensive triumph over evil.¹⁸⁴ However, Ray finds in its strength a reason to use this model for thinking about the relationship between God, humanity, evil and redemption in our current cultural contexts. She claims that “its metaphorical character gives it the flexibility conducive to many readings one of which is a feminist liberation interpretation of the work of

¹⁸⁰ Ray, *Deceiving the Devil*, 123.

¹⁸¹ Ray, *Deceiving the Devil*, 119.

¹⁸² Ray, *Deceiving the Devil*, 126.

¹⁸³ Ray, *Deceiving the Devil*, 127.

¹⁸⁴ Ray, *Deceiving the Devil*, 128.

Christ that brings together contemporary concerns about power, justice and relationality in ways that could shed new light on Christian understanding and responses to human evil.”¹⁸⁵

It is important that we have at least a review of the strengths and weaknesses of each predominantly accepted theory of the Atonement for at least two reasons. First, as Soltis demonstrated in her work, in a nation in which Christianity has been the predominant religion of people in positions of power and therefore a strong influence on social policy, there is a conflation of a belief in the atoning work of Christ and our criminal justice system, which has in its design the capacity to support both retributive and restorative justice. The second reason it is important in this project to provide an overview of these theories is that when Darby Ray talks about the Atonement Orthodoxy developing out of a combination of Anselm and Abelard’s theories of the atonement, we need to be able to analyze and critique the ways in which these theories give us controlling images of punishment, redemption, suffering and satisfaction that are enacted, expected and justified in our cultural ethos particularly around notions of incarceration and collateral consequences of incarceration.

Atonement Orthodoxy and Cultural Implications

Darby Ray discusses the atonement orthodoxy as a set of claims and images that are at the center of Christian theology, and the practice that comes out of the theological beliefs, concerning the saving work of God through Christ. She contends that atonement orthodoxy gives contemporary Christians a very problematic doctrine of the atonement developed out of two theories that were given expression in Medieval Europe by Anselm and Abelard. Some of what is problematic about this largely uncritical acceptance of this orthodoxy is that it exerts

¹⁸⁵ Ray, *Deceiving the Devil*, 130.

influence through sermons, hymns and liturgies, and yet is not examined critically.¹⁸⁶ Rather, the atonement orthodoxy that is accepted and passed on is as follows:

At the center of this doctrine stand the claim that through the voluntary obedience and self-sacrifice of Jesus the Christ, perfectly exhibited in his life and especially his death, the disobedience and willfulness of human existence are overcome once and for all; as a result, God's honor and authority are renewed, humanities' sin absolved, and right relationship between the divine and humanity restored.¹⁸⁷

Ray's effort to explore some of the key components of the patristic model through contemporary discussions of the character of good and evil and the meaning of Jesus' life and death is to avoid the problems with atonement orthodoxy without rejecting the idea of atonement altogether as some of her feminist and womanist counterparts do. I appreciate Ray's efforts here, because the challenges that Feminist and Womanist theologians bring to our attention are essential in order to place the theology of the contemporary doctrine of the atonement in critical context. However, to reject the atonement altogether is problematic as well, because in doing so we lose the opportunity for Christians to explore the meaning and significance of the Center of our faith, and we lose the ability to explore the most paradigmatic moment of rupture and repair in the Christian faith tradition.

Reframing Atonement Considering Feminist Critiques and Power

Rita Nakashima Brock is a feminist theologian who both critiques traditional formulations of the atoning work of Christ, and also reimagines what atonement is based on relational values that are not valued within patriarchal societies. Brock begins with a rejection of the traditional conception of original sin, and claims that the notion of original sin comes from

¹⁸⁶ Ray, *Deceiving the Devil*, 2.

¹⁸⁷ Ray, *Deceiving the Devil*, 2.

the brokenness in thought developed within, and conforming to, patriarchal values and norms.¹⁸⁸ She asserts that acquiescence to the power structures that are normalized in patriarchal societies are what promote the idea that we are dependent upon someone or something other than ourselves for our salvation.¹⁸⁹ Brock understands the death of Jesus on the cross as an example of cosmic child abuse. She writes, “Traditional doctrines of salvation reflect by analogy, I believe, images of the neglect of children, or even worse, child abuse, making it acceptable as divine behavior—cosmic child abuse, as it were.”¹⁹⁰ Although, I am not able to join Brock in her belief that we are not dependent on something greater than ourselves for salvation, I do appreciate her critique of original sin and her proposal of the alternative category of original grace. I also appreciate her critique of the ways in which we understand violence in relationship as a normal part of the human condition, and power-over as the only way to understand power when we are embedded in cultures that enact violence and hold these values.

In my view, the strengths of Brock’s wrestling with atonement and salvation are found in her similarity to Marit Trelstad and Pamela Dickey Young. Brock is at her best when she critiques the normalization of power through violence, demonstrates the cultural significance of a theology of salvation that is understood only as salvation through grace given after suffering and violence have occurred, and as she proposes alternative images and understanding of power as more than unilateral and instead power developed through interpersonal connection, mutuality and community. An example of this is Brock’s work in *Proverbs of Ashes*:

¹⁸⁸ Rita Nakashima Brock, *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power* (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 2.

¹⁸⁹ Brock, *Journeys by Heart*, 8.

¹⁹⁰ Brock, *Journeys by Heart*, 56.

Western Christianity claims that we are saved by the execution, that violence and terror reveal the grace of God. This claim isolates Jesus, as violence isolates its victims. When the victims of violence are made singular solitary, unprecedented in their pain, the power of violence remains...Salvation requires love...Salvation also requires mourning.¹⁹¹

Delores Williams, a womanist theologian, also pioneers the feminist and womanist effort to illuminate the very dangerous and oppressive messages that an uncritical acceptance of the atonement orthodoxy pervading many (if not most) Christian worship spaces has on culture and individuals living in relationship in which there is stratification and violence enacted through power differentiation.

Williams' concern focuses on the interpretation of surrogacy and scapegoating—particularly in relation to the self-understanding of African-American women given the ongoing legacy of slavery in the United States. Williams asserts that surrogacy is, and has been, a structure of domination for African American women since slavery. “Surrogacy gives black women’s oppression its unique character and challenges the way redemption is imaged in a Christian context.”¹⁹² She differentiates between coerced surrogacy (during slavery) and voluntary surrogacy (post-slavery). However, she argues that all surrogacy roles that African-American women fulfill are exploitive. She writes: “They rob African American women of self-consciousness, self-care, and self-esteem, and put them in service of other people’s desires, tasks and goals.”¹⁹³ This has implications for theologians’ thinking through the traditional atonement

¹⁹¹ Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes: Violence, Redemptive Suffering, and the Search for What Saves Us* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 250.

¹⁹² Delores Williams, “Black Women’s Surrogacy Experience and the Christian Notion of Redemption” in *Cross Examinations: Readings on the Meaning of the Cross*, ed. Marit Trelstad (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006), 19.

¹⁹³ Williams, “Black Women’s Surrogacy,” 27.

theologies that purport the role of Jesus' on the cross as assuming the sins of others and dying in our place. Williams calls Jesus the ultimate surrogate figure and argues that we have been conditioned to image our redemption through surrogacy and therefore surrogacy takes on a sense of the sacred.¹⁹⁴

Williams relocates the redemptive work of Christ in Jesus's life rather than in his death. She claims that it is the sin of temptation that Jesus conquers in the wilderness through resistance of the temptation valuing material over spiritual, death over life.¹⁹⁵ Williams argues that by viewing Jesus conquering sin in life rather than through his death, black women theologians can demonstrate that the surrogacy role that black women have been assigned through this country's history was not God's intention for them—and is not in any way redemptive.¹⁹⁶

Just as other critiques of the traditional atonement theories conclude, Williams argues that Jesus demonstrates how to live in mutually respectful relationship, and therefore the redemption of humankind is through the life of Jesus and not his death on the cross.¹⁹⁷ William's sensitivity to the need for critique the problem of the ways in which surrogacy and scapegoating helps all of us to think about how understanding atonement and the way in which Jesus as the Christ affects salvation for us informs the ways in which we understand ourselves and ourselves in relationship in social and cultural contexts in which stratification based on gender, race, sexuality and more has consequences on how we understand our use and abuse of power. An

¹⁹⁴ Williams, "Black Women's Surrogacy," 27.

¹⁹⁵ Williams, "Black Women's Surrogacy," 31.

¹⁹⁶ Williams, "Black Women's Surrogacy," 31.

¹⁹⁷ Williams, "Black Women's Surrogacy," 31.

excellent example of Williams' important work, voice and call for change is demonstrated in her writing. She makes the claim that African Americans have been a scapegoated people, and therefore she calls upon African American Christian theologians and pastors to reject scapegoating as a theological image. She writes:

We must throw out all images, beliefs and practices that support scapegoating of any person or group. This in turn means that our African American churches cannot affirm any salvific power in a poor, innocent man dying on the cross for our sins or anybody else's.¹⁹⁸

I have already discussed some of Darby Ray's work concerning the formation of an Atonement Orthodoxy, and later in this chapter I will discuss the work of Marit Trelstad who argues that God has a covenantal nature and therefore we can only understand the atonement through God's nature and will to love. Now, I would like to turn to the work of Pamela Dickey Young who, in her work, "Beyond Moral influence to an Atoning Life," offers a bridge of sorts between Trelstad and Ray's re-interpretation of the salvific work of the atonement understood as involving Jesus' death on the cross and the feminist and womanist scholars who reject Jesus' death as salvific and worry for the message that is promoted when we connect surrogacy, suffering and redemption.

Young, like Trelstad, locates the atonement within a larger context of relationship. She thinks about the human predicament in terms of a lack of integrity or wholeness. We are born into a world in which there is disruption of the ability of the self to be in relationship with others. She writes, "Both original integrity and original sin are understood to be social states, states of the person-in-relation."¹⁹⁹ She argues that it is too limiting to only interpret Jesus' death and that

¹⁹⁸ Delores S. Williams, "Christian Scapegoating," *The Other Side* 29, no. 3 (1993): 44.

¹⁹⁹ Pamela Dickey Young, "Beyond Moral Influence to an Atoning Life," *Theology Today* 52, no. 3 (1995): 346.

to understand the salvific work of God in Christ we also need to attend to the context of Jesus' life and work. She asserts that the Gospel accounts of Jesus' grace-filled relationship with others provide the context in which we can interpret his death on the cross.²⁰⁰ Young proposes to move beyond Gustaf Aulen's categories of the atonement and develop a view that pulls from what she believes are the best in both the classic and the subjective theories.²⁰¹

Young does this with an inclination to a process theological view of the atonement. She claims that, if one sees God's power as relational rather than coercive, this gives us a way to understand the goodness of God and the salvific will of God in the face of the continuance of evil. God offers to the world the best possible range of choices and responds to the choices of humanity in ways that seek to educe the best possible responses.²⁰² This process inclination changes the subjective understanding of the atonement. We are changed by the grace offered by God, without God acting from grace, there would be no change within us.²⁰³ When we act badly—do evil—we are not dominated or rejected by God, rather we are taken up into God who offers grace. We can accept this grace for healing or resist it and remain ignorant of the grace-filled possibilities that God's love offers. When we hear the stories of Jesus' life, and of the way he was in relationship with others, we are included in the offer of grace that was extended to

²⁰⁰ Young, "Beyond Moral Influence," 349.

²⁰¹ Young, "Beyond Moral Influence," 350.

²⁰² Young, "Beyond Moral Influence," 350.

²⁰³ Young, "Beyond Moral Influence," 350.

those whom Jesus encountered in his own life.²⁰⁴ Young connects the classic and subjective models of the atonement when she writes:

God's love triumphs over judgment and wrath, and I can do nothing to earn or deserve it. *But God's act seeks response. Unless I respond to God's gracious gift, I cannot see the grace that God offers as the power and the possibility to mend the brokenness. Unless I accept the offer of forgiveness, I still act as though I am unforgiven; I live brokenly; I live without integrity. And herein is the subjective side of reconciliation...* It is not that God in Jesus does something once that never needs repeating, God's offer of Godself to us in Jesus is an offer enacted over and over again as one encounters Jesus in Scripture and in the Spirit. God offers not a past act but a present relationship with Godself. And this offer of present relationship is embodied in Jesus whom Christians know as the Christ.²⁰⁵

God's offer of grace is continuously pouring out of God's self, and is not restricted to the grace offered through the death of Jesus. Young does not see Jesus' death as salvific, and is concerned that seeing suffering connected to grace may lead to the belief that more suffering yields more grace. Young's focus is on reconciliation and the ongoing possibility of responding to God's grace to change relationship. She believes that what we seek is integrity in relationship that moves beyond suffering.²⁰⁶ Grace is possible despite suffering not because of it. Young concludes:

To place stress and salvific value on the death of Jesus, a death of great cruelty and unnecessary suffering, is not credible in a world where unnecessary suffering abounds. It does no injustice to the gospel to move beyond a set of images that restricts our understanding of the grace of God that Jesus the Christ incarnates...In the atoning life of Jesus the Christ, the power of God's grace is incarnate for us. To accept this offer is not to accept it as "moral influence" but to accept it as the power and the possibility of changed relationships between oneself and God, oneself and other humans, oneself and the whole of creation.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁴ Young, "Beyond Moral Influence," 350.

²⁰⁵ Young, "Beyond Moral Influence," 350-351.

²⁰⁶ Young, "Beyond Moral Influence," 353.

²⁰⁷ Young, "Beyond Moral Influence," 355.

Why Darby Ray's Articulation of the Patristic Model is the most Helpful Framework for this Analysis

In *Deceiving the Devil: Atonement, Abuse and Ransom*, Darby Ray revisits and reinterprets the themes of trickery and ransom which are used in the patristic model of the Atonement in order to bring together different perspectives on the meaning of Jesus's death on the cross. Ray articulates the traditional Christian understanding of Jesus' crucifixion as salvific and the means by our sin is atoned, and puts this into conversation with critiques of the traditional understanding by feminist, womanist and liberation theologians such as Delores Williams and Rita Nakashima Brock who are concerned about how this understanding of suffering and surrogacy in atonement hurts women and children in particular as they are expected to suffer as Jesus suffered. Ray contends that the "Atonement Orthodoxy" that is passed on through mainline protestant churches promotes values that reinforce and reinscribe models of domination and subordination based on social stratification categories of race and gender. Sacrifice, dependency and obedience are expected and rewarded and there is a lack of critical thinking about the uses and abuses of power.

Ray does not reject the atoning work of Jesus in death, instead she turns to images from the patristic model of atonement as articulated by Augustine, Irenaeus and Gregory of Nyssa. In this model held together by images of trickery and ransom, God defeats the devil by letting evil be evil. The natural consequences of arrogance and overreaching results in the defeat of the devil when the devil tries to claim the one without sin. The one without sin then pays the ransom for all who sin. Ray brings the images to light in contemporary terms. The devil is understood to be "the sum of all evil," and evil as the abuse of power actually defeats itself through exposure

for what it is.²⁰⁸ Through this exposure, we are able to recognize and name evil and we have the choice to collude with it, or resist it. Amy Carr wonders if Ray's atonement model works better in respect to institutional aspects of sin rather than interpersonal ones. Carr contends that Ray's work "culls ancient Christian resources for creatively resisting, not only enduring, the forms and effects of human sin."²⁰⁹

Ray finds that, in the patristic ransom model, evil is implied to be an abuse of power.²¹⁰ Therefore, what is overcome by Jesus the Christ is not only individual or personal sin, but the countless ways that human evil (represented by Satan or the devil) manifests itself interpersonally, communally, institutionally and globally. Likewise, redemption is understood primarily as being the liberation from bondage.

Redemption is not understood as the abolition of evil itself, but a transformation in one's relationship to evil. We are not saved from the vicissitudes, vulnerabilities and inevitable suffering of finite existence, but for a particular way of responding to those inevitabilities, a way that Jesus exemplified in his life and death.²¹¹

At the heart of the patristic model is the theme of the struggle against evil. God faces evil not by destroying it, but rather by exposing it.²¹² Jesus resisted and confronted evil not only through his death, but also in his life and practice of mercy and compassion. Ray writes:

Human evil always takes the form of human violence, against self or other; and according to this model of atonement, the one hope for resisting it is to eschew its means, to choose not coercion but nonviolence, not power-as-control but power-as-compassion. This was

²⁰⁸ Ray, *Deceiving the Devil*, 131.

²⁰⁹ Amy Carr, Review of *Deceiving the Devil: Atonement, Abuse, and Ransom*, by Darby Ray, *The Journal of Religion*, 81, no. 2 (2001): 307.

²¹⁰ Ray, *Deceiving the Devil*, 131.

²¹¹ Ray, *Deceiving the Devil*, 132.

²¹² Ray, *Deceiving the Devil*, 137-138.

God's choice; this was Jesus' choice; this is the only choice that can circumvent the cycle of violence.²¹³

Atonement as Redemptive Love and Restored Connection

Marit Trelstad offers some helpful context for our thinking about how atonement functions in our social context, and how we can use the formulation of the doctrine of the atonement in congregational life to set a welcoming context for people who are re-entering society after having been incarcerated. Trelstad contends that traditionally we focus on the cross when we think about the atonement and salvation, but that we ignore the story of covenant that surrounds this event.²¹⁴ She claims that Jesus' suffering and death can only be understood when read through the context of hope and promised life.²¹⁵ In her work, "Putting the Cross in Context: Atonement through Covenant," she argues that God has a "covenantal nature," and that God's covenant with humanity is a primary thread that runs throughout the diverse books in the Bible. Therefore, theologically, atonement is located in the doctrine of God, because God is acting out of God's own being in a covenantal manner. "Atonement and reconciliation with God are not achieved solely through penal substitution, moral influence, Christ's recapitulation of Adam's sins, or a cosmic battle between good and evil. Atonement originates and concludes through God's nature and will to love."²¹⁶

²¹³ Ray, *Deceiving the Devil*, 138.

²¹⁴ Marit Trelstad, "Putting the Cross in Context: Atonement through Covenant," in *Transformative Lutheran Theologies: Feminist, Womanist, and Mujerista Perspectives*, ed. Mary J. Streufert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 107.

²¹⁵ Trelstad, "Putting the Cross," 108.

²¹⁶ Trelstad, "Putting the Cross," 108.

Trelstad claims, and I join her in this belief, that relationship is inscribed in the being of God's own self. Trinitarian theology bears this out. Given this presupposition, she then argues that the divine covenant between God and creation is an "ontological covenant." This means that relationship is part of being, and although the quality of relationship varies immensely—there is no being without relationship. This allows Trelstad to argue that atonement is built into the nature of existence.²¹⁷ At the center of this understanding of the atonement is the way in which grace and love are in relationship to one another. This helps us with the Reformed understanding of atonement and salvation—that we have been saved by grace through faith. Both Barth and Luther locate grace as the first act of God, and taking that a step further (as Winnicott reminded us) before *doing* there is *being*.²¹⁸ God acts graciously because God is love. As Trelstad writes: "God's grace is contingent upon neither works nor choice. We are ultimately reconciled with God because God is love. An inviolable covenantal relationship of love and acceptance, of God's promising again and again to accompany humankind, is the very meaning of grace."²¹⁹

Trelstad concludes that by taking into account the context of the cross event as the covenantal relationship with God, there is never a risk that we will fall out of relationship with God. The relationship between God and God's creation is a part of the nature of both God and the world.²²⁰ When we view atonement within the context of covenantal relationship, we are directed to notice the persistence of God's grace that comes out of God's steadfast love. Trelstad

²¹⁷ Trelstad, "Putting the Cross," 117.

²¹⁸ Trelstad, "Putting the Cross," 117.

²¹⁹ Trelstad, "Putting the Cross," 118.

²²⁰ Trelstad, "Putting the Cross," 117.

concludes, “Reconciliation is through living relationship and this is the context within which the cross must be understood, not as the sole agent of atonement.”²²¹

Wonhee Ann Joh: Exploring the concepts of *Han* and *Jeong*

Picking up on Trelstad’s notion of reconciliation through relationship, I want to consider here the work of Wonhee Anne Joh in her book, *Heart of the Cross: A Postcolonial Christology*. In *The Heart of the Cross*, Joh offers a Christology from a feminist postcolonial perspective that presents critical correctives and revision to traditional Christologies that have been critiqued by feminist and womanist scholars as glorifying suffering and victimization.²²² The aspect of Joh’s work that is particularly useful for this project are the main resources for her revised Christology: the Korean concepts of *han* and *jeong*. Joh draws from other Korean theologians to examine the concept of *han*, which conveys a sense of abjection and suffering. She introduces and elaborates on the concept of *jeong*, which defies definition, but connotes a relationally based sense of cohesion, forgiveness and compassion. Joh finds continuity in the life and death of Jesus through the concept of *jeong*. She contends that Jesus embodied *jeong* in his interactions and relationships with those whom he encountered in his life and that in his death on the cross Jesus does not reject *han*, but rather embraces and transcends it.²²³ Therefore, the cross is about transcendence of the abject and the redeeming qualities of *jeong*. Joh writes, “The cross intimates the significance of *jeong*/love; but is not immune to the horror of *han*. The cross

²²¹ Trelstad, “Putting the Cross,” 121-122.

²²² Elaine Graham, Review of *Heart of the Cross: A Postcolonial Christology*, by Wonhee Anne Joh, *Theology*, 111, no. 862 (2008): 294.

²²³ Graham, “The Heart,” 294.

therefore transgresses doctrinal self-enclosures and instead privileges *jeong* as the divine presence between the divine and the world.”²²⁴

For this project, the work of Joh is most helpful in four ways. First, her elucidation of *han* and *jeong* gives us a way to think theologically about how the abject is not rejected but rather transcended through compassionate relationship. For this project, there are two discernable and distinct yet interrelated ways to think of this. On a personal level, the returning citizens who have committed murder are released from prison, and yet the victim of their crime remains dead. After release from institutional punishment has been complete, they must find a way to live with the atrocity of having taken a life, and yet move forward with their own lives. In this way, relationship, compassion, and love, in relationship, overcomes the horror of the past from which one wants to distance oneself, but can never be rid of entirely. This is also an instance in which the experience of returning citizens puts into high relief struggles that every human being has. Therefore, a deliberative theology of atonement that included this understanding would be a common ground for returning citizens and those who have never been incarcerated in the intentional Christian community proposed in this project. Secondly, on a social level, the notion of the abject being transcended by qualities and practices that produce right relationship is a way to think about incarceration. These questions should at least be considered: Do we as a culture use the prison system and incarceration to create distance from what we don’t want to face about ourselves collectively? Does the denial of the abject on a social level lead to conditions of collateral consequences in a time of mass incarceration to perpetuate the separation of what we want to see and what we want to deny in ourselves? These questions cannot be resolved here, but I raise them to demonstrate the kind of thought and work that an intentional

²²⁴ Joh. *Heart of the Cross*, 118.

Christian community could do with a deliberative theology of the atonement that included an awareness that in His life and on the cross, Jesus did not reject the undesirable, but rather used His life and death to transform the conditions that created the personal and social ills that plagued those He loved.

A second way that Joh is helpful to this project is in her ability to hold together in the event of the cross, both the horror and the grace, without minimizing one in order to privilege the other, which helps us to bring together the personal experience of sin as discussed by returning citizens. These women seem to have a lived experience and visceral sense of the grace of God, which is enacted through relational repair. We will hear this in the words of Laurel in the next section of this chapter as she discusses the relationship between forgiving the man who killed her child in order to honor her deceased child.

Third, using her identification of an interstitial space helps us to take her theory and apply it to the practical purpose of healing through community that is intentional about healing relational practices and that holds a deliberative theology of the atonement as its guiding communal faith narrative. Fourth, working with her articulation of *jeong*, and its possibilities, particularly as she demonstrates Jesus' embodiment of *jeong*, gives us a practical focus and a way to be disciples: following the path that Jesus laid out through his words and deeds.

Rupture and Repair

A deliberative theology of the atonement is foundational for this community. This is because the doctrine of the atonement is the major theological Christian concept that works with the dynamic of rupture and repair, particularly in relationship. Thinking about rupture and repair in relationship has characterized the theoretical aspect of this work. In this chapter, I explore the

ways that differently located theologians explain the rupture and repair in the relationship between God and humanity. In the chapter “Relationship Matters,” I discussed the value and function of rupture and repair through the lens of Winnicott’s theories of development of trust and love in the mother-child relationship, or a caregiver-careseeker relationship characterized by attunement and responsiveness to the needs of the other. Winnicott contends that love is communicated through the failures of empathy and the repair of those failures in relationship. Likewise, in the chapter in which I consider trauma, the pastoral theologians who contributed to this work examine what is necessary for the repair of relational selves that have been overwhelmed by violence. This theme also runs throughout the chapter on conditions of mass incarceration. There it is evident how this dynamic functions not only on an interpersonal level, but also on a social, cultural and institutional level. It is also possible to hear this struggle embodied within the words of the returning citizen research partners for this project. One element of corrective or critique that I believe the returning citizens can offer to the theologians regarding theories of the atonement is the very personal nature of sin that separates one from God. Understanding the atoning work of God in Christ is not an intellectual activity, it is not something that is removed from everyday life, and it is certainly not something removed from the choices we make in our everyday lives and relationships. Hearing Laurel talk about why she struggled to forgive the man who killed her child demonstrates how embodied the theological engagement of rupture and repair is. This excerpt of our interview demonstrates how she continues to try to reconcile her past to her present self through conscientiously integrating her own theologically informed values about rupture and repair into her life in a way that honors the gravity of her daughter’s murder.

I had one co-defendant. He was sentenced to 15 years to life for second degree murder. And second degree is the appropriate sentence. First degree means malice aforethought.

He was sociopathic, but he didn't wake up that day and said, "Oh I think I'll kill your daughter." It happened, I'll give that much. That was hard. Realizing that for my sake I needed to find a way to forgive and pray for him. And even though I was free and remarried on parole when I found out he died, I had to mourn—not him, but who he should have been at least. If I had not, I would have dehumanized him the way he dehumanized my daughter, and that was unsufferable. I prayed for his salvation. I didn't mean I have to trust him, or want to live with him, or even think he should ever get out of prison. But I could pray that I could hope that someday in heaven, when all is perfect, that he could be there. I doubt that happened, but either he was redeemable or he's not. Either there is redemption for him too, or there is no redemption. And if I cannot mourn for him, for the human he was born to be that never got a chance to be; if I could not mourn for that, then that was absolutely as dehumanizing as anything he had done to my daughter. And [daughter's name] deserves better than that.

The theological, relational and social implications of rupture and repair come together in Laurel's story when she talks about the challenges she faces in her relationship with her surviving daughter. Her words also indicate how very personal the atoning work of Christ is in her life.

I was driving, and all of a sudden I knew how to go away, just go away, just total detached go away, and I heard myself say no. I credit the Holy Spirit, who was using my body to say no and I opened eyes I didn't know were closed. And I was at a tree, telephone pole, whatever, pulled over to the side of the road, and I just cried and cried and cried. And I got myself to my parents' home where I was staying while I was on bail. As I said, I was already in counseling, called my therapist and he asked if I would be ok until the next day, so I did some journaling that night and brought in the journal the next day. He took a look at the journal and said, "I didn't know if you would ever be able to come to these realizations, and I can make you some promises. I can't give you the answers today, but I promise you if you keep looking, there are answers to all of these questions," and that was the first day of the rest of my life. 'Cause while I was screaming and crying and praying to God on the side of the road, it was, "God, I was being the very best mother I knew how to be, we were stone cold sober this day that this happened and that I couldn't protect my own child, and I was being the very best mother I could be. I can't live with who I am [She is crying a lot here and it is hard for me to hear what she is saying] everybody I ever loved was hurt, and I was being the best that I knew how to be and, you won't let me die? That is so unfair. So, if you won't let me die, I know there is something in Your word about new creation. You've got to make me into somebody I can live with, because I can't live with who I am." And that's what Dr. [name] said, there are answers. And the bottom line of Christianity, isn't it about somebody totally innocent having died for your sins? And people take that lightly. They don't know what it means that somebody who shouldn't have died, who was totally innocent of the crime, suffered torture and died because I wasn't living the way I should have been. making the decisions I should have been, and now I have one choice. Do I waste the price that can't ever be

unpaid, or do I use it? That's what Christianity is. Do we use the price that Jesus paid on the cross? Do we become the best instruments of God that we can in this fallen world? And therefore anything I could do good from that moment on, is a tribute to [murdered daughter's name]. And it's the only reason I can live in this skin [She said this so quietly, I made a note to myself in the interview transcript that I think this is what she said].

Laurel's words demonstrate the way in which, for this intentional Christian community to develop a deliberative theology of atonement we must be able to articulate one that is true to both the experience of personal sin and corporate sin. When I listen to Laurel, and I think about my own experience participating and leading liberal leaning Christian communities, I think about the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer in *The Cost of Discipleship*. I hear in his discussion of cheap and costly grace the struggle many often face to really contend with the price of the repair of our relationship with God. Bonhoeffer writes:

Cheap grace means grace as a doctrine, a principle, a system. It means forgiveness of sins proclaimed as a general truth, the love of God taught as the Christian "conception" of God...In such a Church the world finds a cheap covering for its sins; no contrition is required, still less any real desire to be delivered from sin...Cheap grace means the justification of sin without the justification of the sinner. Grace alone does everything, they say, and so everything can remain as it was before. "All for sin could not atone."... Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate...Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock. Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life.²²⁵

Developing a deliberative theology of the atonement around which this intentional Christian community can develop requires serious consideration of how deadly both the personal and corporate expression of sin is in the rupture of relationship.

²²⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 2012), Kindle, chap 1.

I believe that bringing together the work of Darby Ray and Wonhee Anne Joh can enable the articulation of an atonement theology that accounts for the very personal and visceral experience of sin and the need for redemption that is called for in some voices of returning citizens; this integration would also take into account the more typical liberal Christian theology of sin as separation from God through the abuse of power. I will include this discussion in the next chapter as I will discuss there the transformed possibilities for discipleship that are possible given a revised and deliberative theology of the atonement in an intentional Christian community.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the ways in which the doctrine of the atonement informs the legal system in this country, four major theories of the doctrine of the atonement, feminist critiques of this doctrine as well as a reframed understanding of the atonement that puts our relationship with God at the center of our being. I have demonstrated that the implications of understanding and being able to articulate both evil and redemption as Christians is critical to this project in that it will be central to the formation of an intentional Christian community focused on healing and transformation enacted through relationship. With this in mind, in the next chapter I turn toward a discussion of that community.

Chapter Seven

Forming the Resilient Community

Introduction

In this chapter, I bring together the work in the previous chapters to propose what an intentional Christian community might look like when centered around the desire to be faithful in worship and fellowship through discipleship that followed the life, work and teachings of Jesus and sought to change systems of exploitation and disenfranchisement. What is unique about this community is that it would be built from the beginning by returning citizens and those committed to being in partnership with returning citizens to faithfully oppose the abuse of power that leads to conditions of mass incarceration. This community would bring together returning citizens and evangelical activists to form a community in which the human needs of its members and the human rights of all returning citizens in the United States are elevated as something that is of the utmost importance to sharing the good news of Christ's love. Evangelical activists are people who locate their activism in the gospel. The first two sections of this chapter are spent engaging the work of pastoral theologian Jan Holton, who demonstrates concern with and commitment to learning more about what it means to build such a community as I am describing here. This is followed by a description of the movement in the Presbyterian Church (USA) of 1001 New Worshipping Communities as a model and platform from which the intentional Christian community envisioned throughout this project could be enacted by utilizing the correlation of the lived experience reported by returning citizens, pastoral theologians' work on trauma and resilience and the contribution of psychological theorists on how healing occurs through attunement and reliability in relationship.

Understanding Incarceration as Forced Displacement

In her book, *Longing for Home: Forced Displacement and Postures of Hospitality*, Jan Holton offers us a very helpful outline, or guide, for thinking about what such an intentional Christian community might look like in practice. Although Holton does think peripherally about people who are incarcerated as forcibly displaced people, they are not her main focus. However, integrating Holton's excellent thinking on the challenges of forced displacement with the work others have done on the collateral costs of mass incarceration, reveals that there is, in fact, more relevance to Holton's work for returning citizens than has yet been explored. Holton's helpful orientation that focuses on relationship building between groups of people who have more secure places in society and those who have less secure spaces is reflected in her words, "Building authentic relational care that can begin to repair social exclusion between the displaced and others requires a particular, embedded orientation that turns practice intentionally toward its relational end."²²⁶ This is an excellent statement that encapsulates the ultimate goal of this project as a work that integrates pastoral and practical theology.

This project has thus far explored the social problem of mass incarceration and the ways in which the Christian doctrine of the Atonement can support or subvert cultural understanding of justice as retributive or restorative, engaged the lived experience of returning citizens after serving decades in prison, explored trauma from a pastoral perspective, and analyzed the elements of relational holding that can be offered in Christian community. This section uses

²²⁶ M. Jan Holton, *Longing for Home: Forced Displacement and Postures of Hospitality* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), Kindle, chap. 8.

Holton's work on the experience of forced displacement to explore the ways in which intentional Christian community and the inherited Christian narrative can provide space to hold the relational work of healing from experiences of long term incarceration and reentry into a culture with a strong investment in collateral consequences post incarceration. Heard through the filter of all that we have explored about mass incarceration, what Holton writes about forced displacement provides a good rationale for engaging her work to consider how to construct an intentional Christian community that offers both space for healing and for transformation of conditions that contribute to the trauma experienced. Holton writes:

First, I suggest that forced displacement can disrupt spiritual, psychological, and social flourishing by interrupting the central aspects of home (meaning, belonging, relationship, and sense of security). Second, I argue that those forcibly displaced from home are susceptible to social exclusion that becomes institutionalized in various ways. Third, I contend that it is the responsibility of the community of faith, as a just community, to respond with a particular notion of hospitality that attempts to repair social exclusion and alienation.²²⁷

In her work, Holton constructs a theology of home, uses contextual case study to listen to the lived experience of those who have experienced displacement and then develops four “postures of hospitality” that inform what she calls a moral obligation of care. In her concluding chapter, Holton writes, “Displacement starts out being about a need for place but quickly becomes about a need for repairing relational woundedness between persons without home and the communities in which they seek shelter.”²²⁸ I have found a similar truth in my work with returning citizens—people who have been forcibly displaced from home and community, have lived for decades as incarcerated human beings and have only then been released from prison. However, when considering the context of returning citizens, returning from incarceration into a

²²⁷ Holton, *Longing for Home*, Introduction.

²²⁸ Holton, *Longing for Home*, chap. 8.

social system heavily and historically constructed and influenced by mass incarceration and correctional control, we need to rephrase Holton's contention given the ongoing collateral cost of the prison label. The transformation of the community and the systems in which the member of the community and the returning citizens are both embedded means that hospitality may not be the most relevant guiding theological precept here, but instead the intentional Christian community that we might put together has at its center a theology of redemption.

In her discussion of the communal contextual paradigm—a paradigm outlined by John Patton and one in which both Holton and myself are firmly located, Holton demonstrates her commitment to take further Patton's commitment to re-visioning. She writes:

I have suggested that remembering goes beyond the “re-visioning” that Patton suggests toward an act of bringing the fractured community together, especially in contexts of displacement and trauma. I have written, “Re-membering is the heart of the caring ecclesial community but extends beyond to the greater community. It is the root of the moral obligation to care.” I expand on this to suggest that the role of remembering is not only a bringing together in mindful relationship but also a just engagement by a community of faith that seeks to repair the exclusionary breach of relationships created by forced displacement.²²⁹

I agree with Holton's extension of Patton's conception of re-visioning, and that a central aspect of work within the communal-contextual framework of pastoral theology is the act of bringing together those who have faced displacement and trauma. In addition, I appreciate the thoughtfulness she brings to a focus on just engagement that aims to repair relationships created by conditions of forced displacement. In my work with the previously incarcerated, I would suggest that we build on this even further, in order to insist that a central aspect of faith in such a community is work for the transformation of conditions that facilitate the disenfranchisement of people disproportionately vulnerable to incarceration and correctional control. This means that

²²⁹ Holton, *Longing for Home*, chap. 8.

in order to be faithful disciples, members of such a community would need to be actively committed to doing work in the world to dismantle racism, economic disparity, and the creation of an underclass through the use and abuse of the prison-industrial complex in the United States. In short, in a sense, if we take seriously the conditions that lead to the construction of mass incarceration in the United States, we find a roadmap for faithful practice because opposing these conditions leads us to following the teachings of Jesus.

Forming the Resilient Community

I have written throughout this work about working toward the development of an intentional Christian community, and in the following sections I will propose a model of what such a community might look like and how it might function. But one of the defining characteristics of such a community will need to be one that has resilience at its core. Again, it is helpful to turn to the work of Jan Holton, this time from her book, *Building the Resilient Community: Lessons from the Lost Boys of the Sudan*. A theme that runs throughout Holton's work that makes her such a valuable resource for this project is her ongoing interest in, and commitment to, wondering about how communities manage trauma and find ways of thriving. She writes: "From the earliest days of my career as an academic, I have been pursuing the question of trauma and resilience in communities afflicted with violence and disaster. How, I ask, can people in utterly devastating circumstances manage not only to persevere but even to thrive?"²³⁰ This is a central question that drives the work in this project as well. How can we, through the discipline of practical theology and the lens of pastoral theology, assist women, who

²³⁰ M. Jan Holton, *Building the Resilient Community: Lessons from the Lost Boys of Sudan* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), Kindle, chap.1.

have experienced long incarceration and the conditions associated with incarceration, make a transition out of incarceration that addresses the psycho-spiritual needs that they are able to articulate, and also the ones that their articulation of their experience imply.

In her work, Holton studies the Dinka people to learn about the way that the resilience she saw was formed, and how the trauma of war and the casualties of war were managed. What she found was that there were factors in this community that promoted resilience and coping with trauma that did not involve the use of psychotropic medication. Some of the elements of the resilient community that she found that seem to be able to translate from the non-Western to the Western context and have possibilities for use in the intentional Christian community we are discussing here are: creating a relatively safe holding place, articulating justice, telling a collective trauma story, and developing a communal faith narrative. In her book on forced displacement, Holton also proposes four “postures of hospitality” that a community could have toward a displaced person. Holton lists these four postures of hospitality from which arise practices of care relevant to the lives of displaced people: Sacred place-making, honoring a renewed sense of “we,” willing vulnerability and love and justice.²³¹

In the following sections, I will suggest ways that we might use Holton’s work to propose functional guidelines for the intentional Christian community that this project has been working toward. I do this by following Holton’s criteria for resilience through community and also imagining the ways in which, for our context, her proposals of practices of care that emerge from that posture might function. I will also note where we find embedded in Holton’s categories the work explored in earlier chapters on trauma and relationship. After this exploration, we will have a strong foundation to articulate what an intentional Christian community seeking to be a place

²³¹ Holton, *Longing for Home*, chap. 8.

of transformation and healing for reentering citizens could look like, at least in its proposed iteration. By engaging the framework of the 1001 New Worshipping Communities movement of the PCUSA, we can then see how this project could be put into practice immediately. One of the most valuable aspects of Holton's thinking that makes her a wonderful conversation partner for this stage of the project is her awareness that what is essential in these concrete practices happens through the relational care. She writes: "But building authentic relational care that can begin to repair social exclusion between the displaced and others requires a particular, embedded orientation that turns practice intentionally toward its relational end."²³² Therefore, in the next section, I will propose ways that her four "criteria for resilience" from her work *Building the Resilient Community*, and her four "postures of hospitality," from her work *Longing for Home*, can function as a framework to organize the work and learning from previous chapters.

Building Resilience into Community

Creating a Relatively Safe Holding Place

The creation of the relatively safe holding place would be the formation of the intentional Christian community itself. The reliable holding of a space in which people are able to develop hope, imagine their future as one of promise, find healing, and identify themselves as an integral part of God's family and inheritors of God's salvific promise and vision takes on both relational aspirations and also the realities of living as one who has been previously incarcerated.

In order to create a relatively safe space for holding and healing, several factors would need to be taken into account. The first is related to a physical meeting space. The community

²³² Holton, *Longing for Home*, chap. 8.

would need to be well aware of the issues, in particular that returning citizens remain a more vulnerable population due to correctional control (i.e. stipulations of parole), collateral consequences (i.e. loss of the right to vote and therefore full citizenship in this country), as well as other issues stemming from carrying the prison label. For example, the community will need to figure out how to manage the common stipulation of parole that people whose cases involved harm of a minor may not have direct contact with minors as a part of their parole. Laurel mentioned this in her interview, and many of my counseling clients (none of whom I would have considered a risk to children—my own or others), struggled with this stipulation of their parole. This is only one of the more quantifiable considerations that need to occur to create a relatively safe holding place in an intentional Christian community.

Usually when we say holding space, we are thinking back to what we explored in the work of Winnicott or Ulanov in Chapter 3. A relatively safe holding space would need to be one in which there is interpersonal relational space created between people within community and between people and God that allows for growth and exploration of self and world and, in particular, the kind of supported vulnerability necessary to develop an understanding of dependence on God that is foundational for the Christian journey. Embedded within the vision of the community would need to be an articulation of the expectation of relational standards that promote the kind of reliability, attunement and growth promoting relationships as articulated by Winnicott, Ulanov and Jordan.

Articulating Justice (and Injustice)—With A Theology of Redemption at the Center

“There is a powerful effect, however, that comes when the traumatically injured are surrounded by a community that names the wrong and demands justice.”²³³ These are the words Holton uses when discussing the power of articulating justice even when the justice one deserves and seeks is not likely to materialize under current social or political conditions. In her study, she is referring to the Dinka tribe during war time and, in this study, we would need to consider this in relationship to what we know about the multisystem interlocking forms of oppression that fuel and are produced by mass incarceration in this country (racism, sexism, economic disparity and the court system, etc.). Without being able to provide the actual justice due returning citizens, this community, in order to be a resilient community, would need to provide a space for the articulation of justice and injustice.

This is one of the many places where we see that separating out these categories into constitutive pieces to create a community in which resilience is promoted is really most useful for purposes of analysis, but that the distinctions are not actually separate from one another. For example, creating and maintaining a relational space in which justice could be articulated helps to form a safe space for both returning citizens and their families, all of whom may be experiencing trauma from the experience of incarceration and the collateral consequences of incarceration. Judith Herman writes:

The response of the community has a powerful influence on the ultimate resolution of the trauma. Restoration of the breach between the traumatized person and the community depends, first, upon public acknowledgment of the traumatic event and, second, upon some form of community action. Once it is publicly recognized that a person has been harmed, the community must take action to assign responsibility for the harm and to

²³³ Holton, *Building the Resilient Community*, chap. 5.

repair the injury. These two responses— recognition and restitution— are necessary to rebuild the survivor’s sense of order and justice.”²³⁴

A community that is committed to articulating justice and promoting efficacy for ending the conditions of injustice, particularly as they promote the problems involved in mass incarceration discussed throughout this work, is a community that is a healing community. This articulation and work takes place in a relational space that is intentional about the development and facilitation of reliable holding relationships between God and people. When this takes place within interpersonal relationships in which redemption is understood as integral to creation and maintenance of these relational holding spaces, this community has the potential to be a space in which there is healing from trauma and from which there is the development of hope leading to the ability to affect the change required for the justice sought.

This is where the multivalent concept and experience of redemption and a considered and mutually accepted articulation of the Christian doctrine of the atonement is essential. None of us want to be defined by our worst action; likewise, none of us want to look too deeply at the privilege and power we maintain by having a segment of the population that is cast as an underclass. However, if we are going to articulate justice between us, these are just the types of things we are going to need to discuss in the kind of intentional Christian community that I am proposing. Taking into consideration the unarticulated atonement orthodoxy that many Christians accept without any level of critical analysis along with the critiques of feminist and womanist scholars, we can engage Darby Ray’s assertion that “within the corpus of Christian theology, it is precisely the doctrine of atonement whose job it is to reflect on the reality and

²³⁴ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, chap. 3.

tenacity of human evil and to attempt to articulate how it is that God offers a salvific alternative to this evil.” We can also think of Laurel’s witness that:

In prison--on the outside you can have issues with congregations trying to convince them that they are really sinners. You don’t have that issue in prison--your issue in prison is convincing us that we are actually redeemable. And so a theology--I give examples of prison theology as challenges to churches to come up with their own contextual prison ministry theologies that depend on the church and the context they are ministering into to look at and if the prison ministry is not grounded on redemption--it’s not very useful.

Within this community, we can explore and examine whose interests are served by not engaging in a conscientious theology of redemption using the doctrine of the atonement. We can explore how we conceptualize evil, and whether we agree with Ray’s notion of the abuse of power as evil. The possibilities are tremendous but, in order to engage justice theologically, we need to have an articulation of the redeeming work of Christ and opportunities for critical consideration of how we believe Christ’s work and ministry are in fact salvific so we can go and do likewise in discipleship.

Telling a Collective Trauma Story

The Christian community intending to provide a space and relationship through which healing of traumatic experience incurred through incarceration could occur would need to find methods to speak about the ways in which each member had experienced trauma. For some returning citizens, there would likely be some elements of incarceration that would be included in their narrative if the findings from this study are in fact representative of the experience of incarcerated people and unpredictable environments. However, we need to resist the inclination to assume of returning citizens that their experience of incarceration is the most salient facet of their identity. Just like any other multifaceted human being, it may be at times the most present reality in their lives, and at other times it may not. Further, returning citizens who were

incarcerated as adults have experiences (some of which were likely traumatic) from childhood, adolescence and often young adulthood that they carry with them from the before they were ever incarcerated. Remembering our definition of trauma from Judith Herman articulated earlier in this project, we know that trauma is extraordinary due to its ability to overwhelm:

Traumatic events are extraordinary, not because they occur rarely, but rather because they overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life. Unlike commonplace misfortunes, traumatic events generally involve threats to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death. They confront human beings with the extremities of helplessness and terror, and evoke the responses of catastrophe.²³⁵

I found, in my time counseling women from this population, that it was important to be selectively self-revealing about my own experience of trauma so the returning citizens I was working with knew that I could understand, if not the particulars of their experience, certainly the struggle of trying to live through and thrive after adverse experiences damaging enough to overcome the ability to cope at the time. Some form of disclosure in which community members can develop over time a common narrative of threat and survival would be helpful in order to then link the individual experiences from people's lives into the Christian narrative of trauma, grace, redemption and salvation.

Developing a Communal Faith Narrative

The intentional Christian community that develops between those who are returning citizens and other Christians who want to live out their discipleship through focusing on care and justice for those who have been incarcerated in the United States would need to find a communal faith narrative that was authentic to the community. It is impossible to predict what that might

²³⁵ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, chap. 2.

be since each community would be different, but we can lay out some standards that it would meet. One possibility that might fit well with a community that is intentionally engaging a theology of redemption is the passion story and the impact it had on Jesus' loved ones and disciples. As noted earlier, theologian Serene Jones reminds us that the central narrative of the Christian faith—the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus is a story of trauma and grace. However, the communal faith narrative that supported this community would need to come from the community itself. Holton writes:

A communal faith narrative is a story told by the community itself of how God works through that group to make God's unfolding promise a reality. Such faith narratives are deeply embedded in the culture and ethos of a community... Ultimately, a community's ability to see their own role in the story of God in the world, especially in times of tragedy, provides a deep well of resilience that fosters hope and may help mitigate the damaging effects of trauma.²³⁶

To fulfil this function, it will be essential that the faith narrative that develops is authentic to the whole community and incorporates what may be quite divergent beliefs. In my interview with Laurel, she makes the claim that a major difference between those who have been incarcerated and those who have not is belief in the reality of the demonic. Speaking of the women who have been incarcerated that she is interviewing for her own research project, Laurel told me:

When I ask them what's hardest to speak to the outside volunteers about, it's the reality of the demonic. In our society it is not de rigueur to admit that you might believe in demons. Okay, well the bible says they're there, so maybe I believe in them. But the demonic--is so--presence is so obvious in prison that there's no question of that. And when I say that to like the [name of seminary] African students they go: uh *finally*, a white person who understands the reality. And all of a sudden we have this immediate bond because we understand. That is--so what I'm saying the us against them that's the us against them that I'm talking about. It's us against the demonic, us against the powers and structures, us against CDCR and CCPOA--California Correctional Police Officers Union--the strongest union in the state. I despise CCPOA--I love desperately some of its members. It is not the people--it is the structure that has this in order for them to have more power and strength they need money and this is done on the backs of prisoners.

²³⁶ Holton, *Building the Resilient Community*, chap. 6.

Orientations of Relational Care

In this section, I am using Holton's four proposed postures of hospitality as a starting point to think in particular about how we offer care to one another. However, Holton is specifically thinking about hospitality and how to extend care to someone who has been displaced and is looking for the qualities of home that she articulates throughout her book. I am using her work to think about how we can think about building in expectations or orientations of relational care into an intentional Christian community that has in its conception and practices the promotion of resilience and healing. Therefore, while Holton is thinking about one group of people welcoming another who has been forcibly displaced home—something this project is also considering—here the goal is to use these well thought out categories to create a space of welcoming one another.

Sacred-place making

Holton writes: "Sacred place-making is a posture of hospitality that seeks to recognize the sacred already present and at work in the other."²³⁷ In this sense, the community would seek to offer care by mutual recognition of offering hospitality to one another. For reentering citizens, this may mean working to recognize the sacred at work in the community members who have lived without experiencing much social and political disenfranchisement in their lives and therefore are blinded to social and political realities that the privilege and power they have enjoyed in their lives was gained at a cost. For the non-returning citizens, this may mean having an experience akin to what I experienced when I sat with women who had killed their children.

²³⁷ Holton, *Building the Resilient Community*, chap. 5.

They may need to grapple with loving a person and welcoming them fully into community when they cannot imagine conditions under which they could commit such a crime. There is a lot of work to do to love and respect the person without trying to say well, they are a different person now. The person carries that with her, and recognizing the sacred in another means not dismissing parts of the other that we find undesirable. This is always challenging relational work, but could become heightened in this community.

Renewed Sense of “We”

In thinking about forcibly displaced people, Holton is sensitive to the fact that there is a constant negotiation between people coming together to share a space about who is a part of “us” and who is “them.” She therefore suggests that one of the orientations toward displaced persons that reflects hospitality must include to developing a “renewed sense of we.”²³⁸ For this project’s intentional Christian community, this will be essential. The hope is that, by establishing an intentional Christian community, rather than trying to create aspirational standards by which an already formed community can become more informed and hospitable to the needs of returning citizens, a sense of who “we” decide to become together would develop out of the relationships formed through the common ground of locating oneself within the Christian narrative. A challenge here may be deciding who is not welcome into this community. For example, are children welcome in this community? If they are, then people with stipulations against having direct contact with children are excluded. Are people who demonstrate that they are incapable or unwilling to live into the values and relational practices that are formative and essential to the stated function of this community welcome? If so, how? If a member of this community betrays

²³⁸ Holton, *Longing for Home*, chap. 8.

the trust of the community, how is this handled? These are all things that the community will need to think through and pray about in the ongoing discernment of who “we” are together.

Willing Vulnerability

Just as we emphasized the importance of supported vulnerability in our consideration of the tenets of mutual empathy and relational cultural theory, here is it important to consider what it means to risk making ourselves more vulnerable in relationship in order to be more welcoming to one another. Holton does not romanticize vulnerability and reminds us that often it is not easy *and sometimes it is not wise* to make ourselves vulnerable. However, to actually come together as an intentional community requires that we open ourselves up to experiences that make us more vulnerable. Holton writes, “For those offering a posture of hospitality, literally walking into the marginal spaces is the ultimate opening outward and in itself speaks volumes about our relational willingness to engage difference and open ourselves to the other we encounter there.”²³⁹ In this project, this would include reaching into the prison system. The specifics of what this looks like could be different but, at the very least, it would require advocacy for the human rights of those more vulnerable to incarceration and likely would involve ministry with those who are currently incarcerated.

Love and Justice

In one sense, this whole project is one that brings together love and justice—and so potentially that argument does not need to be made here when we are already planning to form an intentional Christian community to work against the disenfranchisement created by the

²³⁹ Holton, *Longing for Home*, chap. 8.

conditions of mass incarceration. However, Holton's articulation of the function of this particular disposition is rather beautiful. She claims that, although love and justice are always inseparable, pairing them together as a practice of hospitality "bring the displaced and others toward a love characterized by its messy interconnectedness, and function, ultimately, to invite the presence of the Holy."²⁴⁰ She also quotes John Wall's *Ethics in Light of Childhood*, in asserting that the goal of justice is not only to oppose power, but to transform social tensions that are destructive into social tensions that form us into a people who are creatively and radically inclusive of difference.²⁴¹ An ongoing articulation of how love and justice are both embodied and aspirational in this community would perform this posture of hospitality, and I can imagine this being incorporated into the liturgy on a regular basis. I also believe that using a deliberative theology of atonement could be a central means by which to focus the community around a Christian orientation of love and justice. In order to do this, I want to demonstrate how bringing together the work of Darby Ray and Wonhee Anne Joh offers a different understanding of the atonement than is held in most mainline protestant churches, and how this revised understanding of the atonement could lead to transformed action in the world that more accurately demonstrates discipleship through bringing together love and justice.

I find a number of similarities in the work of Darby Ray and Anne Joh that come together in a way of thinking about the atonement that honors the voices of the women who are returning citizens and contributors to this project. This approach makes it possible to incorporate their experiences while simultaneously holding onto the critique of the misuse of social and cultural power more prevalent in liberal mainline Christian communities.

²⁴⁰ Holton, *Longing for Home*, chap. 8.

²⁴¹ Holton, *Longing for Home*, chap. 8.

The first and most obvious similarity is that neither theologian rejects the significance of the atoning work of Jesus' life and death on the cross. Second, in Ray's revival of the classical atonement theory, she finds subversive possibilities redemptive. The atoning work of Christ occurs because the demonic forces are tricked by God into overreaching. Evil, suffering, and the misuse of powers are not denied; they are used subversively, thereby bringing about their own destruction. Ray writes:

God's response to evil is to expose and dramatize the violence and greed at its root, allowing the force of its own avarice to discredit it in the eyes of the moral community and empowering that community to embrace power that is guided and limited by compassion and justice.²⁴²

Similarly, in Joh's work *han* is not denied, rather it is embraced and transcended. She writes: "The ultimate theological thesis of this project is...that the cross works symbolically to embody both *han*/abjection and *jeong*/love."²⁴³

A third similarity is the way in which Joh contends that Jesus chooses to change the world through *jeong* rather than *dan*, and Ray's contention that Jesus chooses to transform the world through the power of compassion rather than choosing power as control.²⁴⁴ Joh writes:

[Jesus] embodied the practice of *jeong*. His radical living out of *jeong* is found in the way this *jeong* is extended to those that should have been "cut off." Jesus' *jeong* is not limited to those who are victims but also extends to the perpetrators of oppression. His practice of *jeong* is what leads to his suffering and death on the cross for he risks the wrath of the oppressive symbolic power. Jesus is unwilling to transform the world through *dan* but rather through constant self-evaluation chooses to transform the world through *jeong*.

²⁴² Darby Ray, "A Praxis of Atonement," 38.

²⁴³ Joh. *Heart of the Cross*, 39.

²⁴⁴ Joh describes *dan* as "the practice of severing/cutting off forms of oppression." Joh, *Heart of the Cross*, 23.

Based on my work as a pastoral counselor to returning citizens, my work on this project, and the life experiences that lead me to want to work with these women, I need to construct and embrace a theory of the atoning work of God through Christ, which acknowledges the death-dealing consequences of sin, evil, and the misuse of power for personal gain. As does Joh, I believe that Jesus used both his life and death to overcome the evil forces that work to disrupt relationship through corrupting the spaces within which we have relationship. What Joh often refers to as interstitial spaces, in which *jeong* is active, I think of as analogous to the healing in relationship that we find in pastoral counseling, not just between the careseeker and caregiver but between both people in the room together with the Spirit of God. These spaces are hard to speak of as the experience of dwelling in them transcends language, but they can be recognized and felt. For this project, I have used Winnicott's theories of the healing and promotion of health that occur within relationship to explain this lived experience theoretically. I have also proposed that we can learn from Winnicott's application to the clinical setting of the development of health in the messy and imperfect, yet reliable and attuned, relationship between mother and child and take this one step further by bringing these health promoting relational dynamics into a communal-contextual realm. Again Joh helps here to bridge the concepts of Winnicott's healing and development in relationship with the atoning work of God in Christ when she writes: "The transgressive and transformative power of the cross lies in its very complex messiness."²⁴⁵ This is one way of speaking about the love that is created, developed, and transformed, as well as healing and alive in the relational space between us.

'Rising out of' the connectedness of heart, *jeong* emerges in a transformative becoming within the interstitial space between the self and the other, a becoming that transcends

²⁴⁵ Joh. *Heart of the Cross*, 118.

han. Here, transcendence does not connote flight, but rather a movement into and in spite of the structures of suffering.²⁴⁶

That Joh gives this space, energy, a name and demonstrates how it works in a revised Christology and theory of the atonement is helpful because it provides a way to think about how a deliberative theory of the atonement can be a center to the intentional Christian community that I am proposing here., that by taking the work that I have done in bringing together the theories of the atonement of Ray and Joh with my own convictions about the atonement, as informed by the voices of my research partners, and discuss how the dominant theory of the atonement, what Ray articulates as the “Atonement Orthodoxy,” in mainline protestant traditions affects our ecclesial life. I, in turn, imagine how adopting a revised theory of the atonement based on healing through relationship that is messy and does not isolate the abject, but transcends it, could affect the reformed community that I am proposing.

Potential for Revised Praxis

Ray contends that the “Atonement Orthodoxy” that is passed on through mainline protestant churches promotes values that reinforce and reinscribe models of domination and subordination based on social stratification categories of race and gender. Sacrifice, dependency and obedience are expected and rewarded and there is a lack of critical thinking about the uses and abuses of power. She writes:

The long and short of this atonement orthodoxy is that suffering, self-sacrifice, and obedience are affirmed as supreme values, while the real action of redemption is understood to have occurred once and for all 2,000 years ago. Within this theological model, divine activity and power are defined at the expense of human agency, and human agency is affirmed only insofar as it takes the form of humble and obedient receptivity. Thus, as feminist theologians have argued, traditional construal of atonement offer an infantilizing theology that undercuts both human responsibility for the creation of our evil

²⁴⁶ Joh. *Heart of the Cross*, 75.

and the expectation that we ought somehow to take an active role in its confrontation. Ironically, the very doctrine whose job is to attempt to understand and articulate God's response to evil functions instead to perpetuate evil in the lives of many women, men, and children.

This is actually an excellent and succinct summary of the interpersonal and socially sanctioned behaviors that are derivative of mainstream Protestant's embrace of the Atonement Orthodoxy. I would add to this that, on the more liberal side of the spectrum, many Christians do not demonstrate a personal connection to the doctrine of the atonement because of a refusal to seriously engage sin and the consequences of sin. So, the perpetuation of evil in the lives of men, women and children comes also from a denial of evil, which then disempowers any real need for the atonement. However, this is where a deliberative theology of the atonement, informed by the voices and experiences of the returning citizens in the community, could be transformative. I propose that using elements of both Darby Ray's and Wonhee Anne Joh's thinking about the atonement would produce a deliberative theology of the atonement from which the community's practices would not deny evil and sin but rather seek to transform them. For example, I can imagine building strategies that come from subverting the misuse of power through exposing that misuse. I can imagine relationships that are growth fostering developing within a community in which the aspiration in following Jesus is to acknowledge the things we dislike about ourselves personally and communally and find ways to remain in the messy relationship to transcend rather than deny the worst in ourselves. The possibilities along these lines are numerous, but the main take away is that a revised and deliberative theology of the atonement based on an awareness of the misuse of power, the need to acknowledge the worst in ourselves rather than casting it off, and the power of compassion and love that is persistent has the potential to lead to revised practices that are not currently the norm in mainline protestant communities that unreflexively and passively accept the Atonement Orthodoxy.

A Proposed Model

In order to bring into being an intentional Christian community, it helps to have a model or a platform with resources enough to support the vision and enable transformation. The Presbyterian Church (USA) offers a model for the development of a community with an orientation to the Christian gospel as one in which love and justice are inseparable, in which trauma and resilience are recognized, in which God offers a relationship with each person that is the holding relationship that allows for growth, and where there is work toward relationships within community that intentionally emulate this model of supported vulnerability. The movement within the PCUSA that could support the enactment of the work of this project is the 1001 New Worshipping Communities.

1001 New Worshipping Communities is a movement in the Presbyterian Church USA to find varied forms of church to match a diverse and changing culture. The 1001 New Worshipping Communities movement in the PCUSA came out of the 220th General Assembly in 2012. They established a church wide movement to create 1001 New Worshipping Communities over the next ten years.²⁴⁷

The goal of these communities has a wide range of manifestations, but all have the telos of forming new disciples of Jesus, of transforming the denomination and to be a transforming presence in the world. The hope and intention of the PCUSA in developing and investing in the 1001 NWC movement is that it will help the denomination shift from a model of worship that has become focused internally and concerned with membership maintenance to a model of

²⁴⁷ Presbyterian Mission Agency, “1001 New Worshipping Communities,” accessed February 1, 2017, <http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/1001-2/>.

church that is creative and outward focused.²⁴⁸ The goal of 1001 NWC is not institutional survival, but rather an intention and a funded model that returns to the goal and vision that is faithful to what the church is called to do and be in the world. Worshiping communities are defined by Acts 2:42: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”²⁴⁹

The defining characteristics of the new worshipping communities are intentionally conceived for each aspect of the enterprise: New, Worshipping and Community.

They are *new* in that they seek to form disciples and continue Jesus’ mission of “discipling, feeding, teaching, healing, welcoming, crossing boundaries, and proclaiming God’s coming realm.”²⁵⁰ They seek to provide a renewed faith to join the Spirit’s transforming work in the world.²⁵¹ And they take on varied forms of church to match the needs of our changing culture. Their goal is to find creative ways to join Christians together for contextual ministry.²⁵² They are *communities* gathered for worship as they are gathered by the Spirit to meet Jesus Christ through Word and Sacrament. They are also communities defined by worship as the members of these communities are sent outward by the Spirit to join God’s plan for the transformation of the world.²⁵³ “Therefore, the primary beneficiaries of the NWC are not its own

²⁴⁸ Presbyterian Mission Agency, “1001 New Worshipping Communities.”

²⁴⁹ Presbyterian Mission Agency, “1001 New Worshipping Communities.”

²⁵⁰ Presbyterian Mission Agency, “1001 New Worshipping Communities.”

²⁵¹ Presbyterian Mission Agency, “1001 New Worshipping Communities.”

²⁵² Presbyterian Mission Agency, “1001 New Worshipping Communities.”

²⁵³ Presbyterian Mission Agency, “1001 New Worshipping Communities.”

members, but rather its community and world.”²⁵⁴ The focus on *worship* is understood as acting in ways that demonstrate the practice of mutual care and accountability in relationships that seek to mature in faith and in life.²⁵⁵ These communities also seek to develop sustainability in leadership and finances.²⁵⁶ “Pastoral leadership, facilities, and programs are all appropriately structured in order to demonstrate good and faithful stewardship.”²⁵⁷

This is a structure within the PCUSA that is set up and organized to support creative worship and transformation that is focused beyond the church itself. It is well funded and provides coaching, webinars, regional gatherings, cohorts for leaders, retreats for spiritual renewal, print resources, a national conference and more. Therefore, it provides both the structure and the flexibility to put into practice the community envisioned and articulated throughout this project.

The process of establishing a NWC is to bring a group of people together and go through a discernment process of what the intention and focus of this community will be. There is a free PDF booklet that guides groups through this discernment process which is available online. There are also grants available to fund the exploration and initiation of ministry through these communities. A seed grant of \$7,500 is available for the first year of exploration and planning. After this first year of ministry, NWC are eligible to apply for a \$25,000 investment grant and then another \$25,000 growth grant. Each NWC is under the care of a presbytery and is therefore a part of the structure of ministry in the PCUSA.

²⁵⁴ Presbyterian Mission Agency, “1001 New Worshipping Communities.”

²⁵⁵ Presbyterian Mission Agency, “1001 New Worshipping Communities.”

²⁵⁶ Presbyterian Mission Agency, “1001 New Worshipping Communities.”

²⁵⁷ Presbyterian Mission Agency, “1001 New Worshipping Communities.”

It was my intention in this chapter to bring together the conversation partners in this project who have demonstrated an opportunity for care and transformation through Christian community with both a framework and a platform for creating such a community. The framework is based in the work of a pastoral theologian who has spent her career working on issues of resilience and compassion. The platform is a model offered by a mainstream Protestant denomination that provides enough structure to offer resources for success, and enough flexibility to allow for creativity, mutual discernment and flexibility to changing conditions in the culture it hopes to transform.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I bring together the work in the previous chapters to propose what an intentional Christian community might look like that had at its center the desire to be faithful in worship and fellowship through discipleship that followed the life, work and teachings of Jesus to change systems of exploitation and disenfranchisement. This community would bring together returning citizens and evangelical activists to form a community in which the human needs of its members and the human rights of all returning citizens in the United States are elevated as something that is of utmost importance to sharing the good news of Christ's love. The first two sections of this chapter are spent engaging the work of pastoral theologian Jan Holton, who demonstrates concern with and commitment to learning more about what it means to build such a community as I am describing here. This is followed by a description of the movement in the Presbyterian Church (USA) of 1001 New Worshipping Communities as a model and platform from which the intentional Christian community envisioned throughout this project could be enacted by utilizing the correlation of the lived experience reported by returning

citizens, pastoral theologians work on trauma and resilience and the contribution of psychological theorists on how healing occurs through attunement and reliability in relationship.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion and Contribution

Introduction

I locate the beginning of my work on this project six years ago when, in the second week of my residency at The Clinebell Institute, I saw my first client—a returning citizen who had just been released from prison after being incarcerated for decades. Over the last six years, this project has formed me as a pastoral counselor and theologian as much as I have formed it at various stages of the work. This work has blessed me with the opportunity to develop both working relationships and friendships with some extraordinary women who have taught me much about resilience, grace and the power of persistence. I am very grateful to have discovered this work that gives me the opportunity to be a scholar-activist and that keeps me engaged in the real struggle to affect change and transformation in the world with the many other women and men who are doing this work.

In Hindsight

Based on my experience and what I have learned from this work over the years, if I were to do it again, I would change a few things. One of the things that I wish I had been able to incorporate into the project is interviews with women who are currently incarcerated with life sentences that include the possibility of parole. I would have liked to have had more of an opportunity to observe the context that I heard so much about by being in the prison, and I would like to have met women who were at a different stage of their journey in this process. However, given the status and reality of women in prison as a vulnerable population, it did not seem viable

to ask the kinds of questions I was asking in my interview to women who could not speak without constant vigilance about how an interview with me might negatively affect their possibility to ever parole. Also, much of the quality of the information I received through my interviews was predicated on a level of trust that existed as a result of having built relationships with these women over time. Second, based upon what I discovered in my research about the multivalent and far reaching collateral consequences of incarceration and the prison label, I would like to have been able to talk to some of the family members of the women that I interviewed to hear firsthand how the research partners' long-term incarceration affected their lives and how, in their opinion and experience, the stipulations of parole and other collateral consequences have impacted their own abilities to reunite and rebuild meaningful and growth producing relationships with their loved ones. Finally, I would have liked to have found models of programs which were focused on specifically enacting transformation through meeting the relational needs of returning citizens who had been lifers. Although I found a wealth of programs that were designed to meet the needs of returning citizens' basic needs through the theological commitment to the precepts of the Christian faith, I did not find any that located the foundation for healing and transformation in the founding of a Christian community with returning citizens as the co-creators of the community. If I had found some communities functioning like this, I believe I would have had more ability to engage diverse experiences of returning citizens to different contexts. All of my research partners and clients came to Claremont after their long incarceration.

Looking Forward

First and foremost, I am looking forward to working with some of the research partners from this project, other returning citizens and some people in the community with whom I have made connections to use this project as a resource as we move together through the discernment process of 1001 New Worshipping Communities to decide whether this is a good time and place to begin the kind of intentional Christian community that is envisioned here. I am also hopeful that this work will raise awareness of the experience and needs of returning citizens who are returning to a culture of stratification along racial, economic and gender lines, disenfranchisement, and rife with collateral consequences to negotiate. Most of all, I want the work that I have done here to be engaged by others and modified to meet the needs I have not and cannot anticipate. In this project, I have attempted to identify some of the main cultural and interpersonal challenges facing returning citizens, and also offer a way through meeting these concerns and needs with the hopeful expectation embedded within the Christian narrative—trusting in the words Jesus spoke to his disciples, “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10).

With Gratitude

Rupture and repair of relational bonds happen on many levels including the interpersonal, social, and theological. In this project, I have considered all of these, primarily because the lives and transitions of returning citizens bring into high relief the relational rupture and repair every human being contends with throughout life. The returning citizens considered in this project have been removed from family and society for decades and are finding their way back into that social fabric. Some of them have transgressed laws that are in place to protect the common

good. Some have taken a life and must struggle with how to use their own lives in a way that honors what they cannot undo, take back or replace. Some have been (and continue to be) betrayed by the cultural conditions that disenfranchise people according to their race, gender, sexuality, economic status, and more. Each of us can relate in our own lives to the ongoing current of rupture and repair that flows through our experiences. In this sense, the dynamic of rupture and repair is a unifying one that an intentional Christian community can engage theologically through the doctrine of the atonement, as well as a psychosocial experience through which empathy can be expressed among and between those who are returning citizens and those who are not.

In the chapter on mass incarceration, I discuss and analyze the cultural and social conditions that lead to rupture and repair on both a systems level and an interpersonal level. Throughout this project, when listening to the women's voices and the ways in which they articulate their experiences, it is clear how they are struggling with what it means to live in the relational spaces characterized by the rupture and repair of the relationships in their lives. In her interview, Laurel demonstrates how social policy and interpersonal relationship are intertwined in the process of working to heal the relationship she has with her surviving daughter:

My surviving daughter, C, was three and a half when I was incarcerated. I had no contact with her for twenty years. My parents were only allowed to visit her if they not so much as mentioned my name for the first nine years plus. Her, her father, I was his second woman, ok, he had just married, so call her third wife, K. raised my daughter, even when he left her and went on to wives four and five. And so K. had a son and daughter also, and so C was raised with her half-brother and half-sister and K. And so it wasn't until she like got to college and she had a writing assignment that said that was, you know write a difficult letter. And so she wrote me a letter asking me all the questions: How could you let this happen? Why did this happen? And although I don't have alcohol and drug issues, everybody in prison knows 12 steps, and I had done Christian 12 steps for co-dependency, facilitated groups on it, so I did a (and a word just escapes me) the letter. I just gave her the honest non-blaming-to-her, taking responsibility, amends letter. And said this is it. And she wrote back and said, I just hated you. I used to take your photograph and look in the mirror and find ways that we are different, because I didn't

want to be anything like you. But you have been honest, and I see what you have done with your life, and I think I want to get to know you better.

At the end of our interview, I asked Laurel an improvised question about what might have made the transition out of incarceration better for her. She identified the restriction against being around children while on parole, which interfered with the restoration she wants to have with her surviving daughter.

Me: Was there anything that you think could have been helpful or more supportive in terms of helping you build the relationships or community that you wanted after you were released? The spirit of the question is: In your experience what would have been better for you? What could have been more helpful to helping you, if anything, to get the community and the relationships that you wanted, needed, hoped for?

Laurel: The children thing. Because during the period that I could have had a lot of restoration in relationship with my daughter before other things happened, and other things being the mother who raised her, the father who raised her; everybody has since betrayed her. I'm the only person who hasn't betrayed her, but I did betray her when I went to prison all those years. So I'm the only one who is alive and within her circle that she can take it all out on, and she tries hard not to, but she does. We could have had a different layer of relationship if we'd been allowed [She speaks too softly for me to hear]. And it was, I can put some responsibility for that on paroles [hard to hear—I think she said paroles—but it might be a proper name], because the actual stipulation on parole was no unsupervised contact with children under 18, which simply means you don't leave me alone with one and that's not how paroles chose to read that. It's how they're reading that for other people now, but it was not how they chose to read that for me.

In this part of Laurel's story, we can hear the ongoing and continuing effort to repair and redeem what has been lost.

Conclusion

As I noted in the atonement chapter, the dynamic of relational rupture and repair in all of its complexity and multivalent interpretations moving through multiple levels and expressions of our relational selves from interpersonal to cultural to theological and ecclesiastical and beyond, is the thread that runs through this project. The experiences that the returning citizens that I have

counseled and that I have interviewed for this project both drive the exploration of the multivalence of rupture and repair in all of our lives and also offer insight into how to use this dynamic for healing, the acceptance of grace and the reaching after hope. Therefore, it is fitting to hear Laurel's words again in the conclusion to this work in which I proposed a model for a community that can acknowledge the rupture and transcend those limitations with the transcendence of repair. This project is my attempt to offer a constructive proposition for an intentional Christian community that utilizes all of the research, critique and analysis that was developed through the previous chapters in order to enter into and build the spirit of resilience that I have found in these women. My life has been transformed through hearing their stories, caring about their lives, sharing their hopes and emulating their resilience. My hope is that this work will offer a similar opportunity for transformation to those who engage it, build upon it, and critique it from their own perspectives.

Appendix A

Consent to Participate in Research

Identification of Investigator and Purpose of Study

You are invited to participate in a research study, entitled: “Building Resilience through Relational Practices: Understanding the Importance of Connection, Attachment and Relational Resilience to the well being of Women ‘Lifers’ who are transitioning from Incarceration to Community.” The study is being conducted by Krista Wuertz under the supervision of Dr. Kathleen Greider of Claremont School of Theology, 1325 N. College Ave; Claremont, CA 91711, kgreider@cst.edu, 909.447.2540.

The purpose of this research study is to examine how relationships support resilience in the major life transition from incarceration to life in community. Your participation in the study will contribute to a better understanding of the relational and social needs of women who have been sentenced to life, and have been incarcerated for decades before being released. You are free to contact the investigator using the information below to discuss the study.

Claremont School of Theology
1325 N. College Ave.
krista.wuertz@cst.edu
(925) 786-1356

You must be at least 18 years old to participate.

If you agree to participate:

- Your participation will consist of an interview that will be approximately one and a half hours in length.
- Your participation is intended to contribute to the understanding of the needs of “lififers” who are transitioning out of incarceration after serving sentences of at least fifteen years.
- Your participation will consist of meeting with me in a location that gives us privacy to talk openly on the Claremont School of Theology campus; answering questions that I am asking about relationships before, during, and after incarceration; and having the interview taped so that I can use the information that you contribute to the study that I am conducting.

Risks/Benefits/Confidentiality of Data

There are no known risks to participation in this study, but it is possible that during the interview or afterward you may experience discomfort which could cause you to feel uncomfortable emotions. If this is the case, please contact Krista Wuertz or Dr. Kathleen Greider, and we will help you to arrange to see an experienced counselor in the Claremont community that can work with you to process this experience. We will compensate the therapist for two sessions with you, as this should provide for both

your immediate need and referral if necessary. The counselor provided will not be a participant in this research project in order to eliminate any conflict of interest. Your name, email address and other personally identifiable information will be kept during the data collection phase, but these will be stored separately from the transcript of your interview. A pseudonym will be used on your transcript to maximize confidentiality. No personally identifiable information will be publicly released. Your personal information, if collected, will be used solely for tracking purposes. A limited number of research team members will have access to the data during data collection. Those research team members are: Krista Wuertz, Dr. Kathleen Greider, Dr. Duane Bidwell, Dr. Monica Coleman.

When the results of the research are published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your identity. If photographs, videos, or audiotape recordings of your participation are used for educational purposes, your identity will be protected or disguised. Your information will be stored until December 31, 2020 and then destroyed. The purpose of this study is to gain insight into practical theology, pastoral care and/or spiritual care. Participation in this study should not be regarded as—or substituted for—therapy by a licensed professional.

Legal Considerations

Any information you may discuss about **prior** criminal activity cannot be used against you in any legal fashion, and I will not report it to any authority including parole officers. I am not required to report this information, and I cannot be compelled to give this information to any legal authority. This information cannot be subpoenaed to be used against you in legal proceedings. This includes any crimes that you have been tried for, and also crimes for which you have not stood trial. However, I will report to authorities any discussion of **current or future** intentions to injure yourself or anyone else. I will also report to authorities anything disclosed that demonstrates the risk of injury to, or abuse of, a child.

Participation or Withdrawal

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline to answer any question and you have the right to withdraw from participation at any time. Withdrawal will not affect your relationship with Claremont School of Theology in any way. If you do not want to participate, you may simply stop participating.

Contacts

If you have any questions about the study or need to update your email address contact the primary investigator Krista Wuertz at (925) 786-1356 or send an email to krista.wuertz@cst.edu. This study has been reviewed by Claremont School of Theology Institutional Review Board and the study number is # 22.

You can also contact Dr. Kathleen Greider, Dr. Duane Bidwell, and Dr. Monica Coleman using the contact information below:

Dr. Kathleen Greider: Claremont School of Theology, 1325 N College Ave, Claremont CA 91711, (909) 447-2540, kgreider@cst.edu

Dr. Duane Bidwell: Claremont School of Theology, 1325 N College Ave, Claremont CA 91711, (909) 447-2528, dbidwell@cst.edu

Dr. Monica Coleman: Claremont School of Theology, 1325 N College Ave, Claremont CA 91711, (909) 447-2532, mcoleman@cst.edu

Questions about your rights as a research participant.

If you have questions about your rights or are dissatisfied at any time with any part of this study, you can contact, anonymously if you wish, the chair of the Institutional Review Board by phone at (909) 447-6344 or email at irb@cst.edu.

Thank you.

❖ SIGNATURE OF PARENT OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

I have read the information provided above. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

Address

Phone

Email

SIGNATURE OF WITNESS

My signature as witness certifies that the participant signed this consent form in my presence as his/her voluntary act and deed.

Name of Witness

Signature of Witness

Date (same as participant's)

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

Signature of Investigator

Date (same as participant's)

A copy of this document will be supplied for your records.

Appendix B

Consent to Participate in Research: Public Figure

Identification of Investigator and Purpose of Study

You are invited to participate in a research study, entitled: “Building Resilience through Relational Practices: Understanding the Importance of Connection, Attachment and Relational Resilience to the well being of Women ‘Lifers’ who are transitioning from Incarceration to Community.” The study is being conducted by Krista Wurtz under the supervision of Dr. Kathleen Greider of Claremont School of Theology, 1325 N. College Ave; Claremont, CA 91711, kgreider@cst.edu, 909.447.2540.

The purpose of this research study is to examine how relationships support resilience in the major life transition from incarceration to life in community. Your participation in the study will contribute to a better understanding of the relational and social needs of women who have been sentenced to life, and have been incarcerated for decades before being released. You are free to contact the investigator using the information below to discuss the study.

Claremont School of Theology
1325 N. College Ave.
krista.wurtz@cst.edu
(925) 786-1356

You must be at least 18 years old to participate.

If you agree to participate:

- Your participation will consist of an interview that will be approximately one and a half hours in length.
- Your participation is intended to contribute to the understanding of the needs of “lifers” who are transitioning out of incarceration after serving sentences of at least fifteen years.
- Your participation will consist of meeting with me in a location that gives us privacy to talk openly on the Claremont School of Theology campus; answering questions that I am asking about relationships before, during, and after incarceration; and having the interview taped so that I can use the information that you contribute to the study that I am conducting.

Risks/Benefits/Confidentiality of Data

There are no known risks to participation in this study, but it is possible that during the interview or afterward you may experience discomfort which could cause you to feel uncomfortable emotions. If this is the case, please contact Krista Wurtz or Dr. Kathleen Greider, and we will help you to arrange to see an experienced counselor in the Claremont community that can work with you to process this experience. We will compensate the therapist for two sessions with you, as this should provide for both

your immediate need and referral if necessary. The counselor provided will not be a participant in this research project in order to eliminate any conflict of interest.

Your name, email address and other personally identifiable information will be kept during the data collection phase, but these will be stored separately from the transcript of your interview. A pseudonym will be used on your transcript to maximize confidentiality. No personally identifiable information will be publicly released. Your personal information, if collected, will be used solely for tracking purposes. Every effort will be made to keep all personal identifiable information private, however due to your status as a public figure, it is possible that someone may be able to connect your life experience to this study. A limited number of research team members will have access to the data during data collection. Those research team members are: Krista Wuertz, Dr. Kathleen Greider, Dr. Duane Bidwell, and Dr. Monica Coleman.

When the results of the research are published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your identity. If photographs, videos, or audiotape recordings of your participation are used for educational purposes, your identity will be protected or disguised. Your information will be stored until December 31, 2020 and then destroyed. When the results of the research are published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would intentionally reveal your identity. However, it is possible that people will be able to infer that you participated in this study due to your status as a public figure. If photographs, videos, or audiotape recordings of your participation are used for educational purposes, your identity will be protected or disguised. Your information will be stored until December 31, 2020 and then destroyed. The purpose of this study is to gain insight into practical theology, pastoral care and/or spiritual care. Participation in this study should not be regarded as—or substituted for—therapy by a licensed professional.

Legal Considerations

Any information you may discuss about **prior** criminal activity cannot be used against you in any legal fashion, and I will not report it to any authority including parole officers. I am not required to report this information, and I cannot be compelled to give this information to any legal authority. This information cannot be subpoenaed to be used against you in legal proceedings. This includes any crimes that you have been tried for, and also crimes for which you have not stood trial. However, I will report to authorities any discussion of **current or future** intentions to injure yourself or anyone else. I will also report to authorities anything disclosed that demonstrates the risk of injury to, or abuse of, a child.

Participation or Withdrawal

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline to answer any question and you have the right to withdraw from participation at any time. Withdrawal will not affect your relationship with Claremont School of Theology in any way. If you do not want to participate, you may simply stop participating.

Contacts

If you have any questions about the study or need to update your email address contact the primary investigator Krista Wuertz at (925) 786-1356 or send an email to krista.wuertz@cst.edu. This study has been reviewed by Claremont School of Theology Institutional Review Board and the study number is # 22.

You can also contact Dr. Kathleen Greider, Dr. Duane Bidwell, and Dr. Monica Coleman using the contact information below:

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Dr. Monica Coleman: Claremont School of Theology, 1325 N College Ave, Claremont CA 91711, (909) 447-2532, mcoleman@cst.edu

Questions about your rights as a research participant.

If you have questions about your rights or are dissatisfied at any time with any part of this study, you can contact, anonymously if you wish, the chair of the Institutional Review Board by phone at (909) 447-6344 or email at irb@cst.edu.

Thank you.

❖ SIGNATURE OF PARENT OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

I have read the information provided above. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

Address

Phone

Email

SIGNATURE OF WITNESS

My signature as witness certifies that the participant signed this consent form in my presence as his/her voluntary act and deed.

Name of Witness

Signature of Witness

Date (same as participant's)

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

Signature of Investigator

Date (same as participant's)

A copy of this document will be supplied for your records.

Appendix C

Dissertation Research Partner Questions

Demographic Questions

1. How old are you?
2. How do you identify in terms of gender?
3. How do you identify in terms of racial/cultural identity?
4. How old were you when you were incarcerated?
5. How old were you when you were released?
6. How many times did you appear before the parole board?
7. How many times were you granted parole by the board before being released?
8. How many years in to your sentence were you first offered an appearance before the board?
9. What was your case?
10. What was the charge that you were convicted of that resulted in your incarceration?
11. What was your sentence?
12. Did you have co-defendants?

Open Questions

Pre-incarceration

1. Before you were incarcerated, can you describe any community that you were a part of?

Incarceration

1. Can you describe how you found community in prison?
2. Did you have close personal relationships that lasted over time—best friends—a close knit group?

3. Were there any impediments were there to building community while incarcerated?
4. Did you have more friends that were lifers or women who knew their out dates—was that even relevant?
5. Do you believe that race and/or cultural identity figured into the significant relationships (however you define that) you had while in prison? How about before being incarcerated? After release?
6. Were there other factors as well (age, sexual orientation, religious beliefs or practices, etc.) that you believe factored into the friendships you developed and maintained while incarcerated?

Post-Incarceration

1. If you feel like you have found community after your release, can you describe how you found community (was it new—or was it pre-existing)? Can you describe the community that you have found?
2. How have the friendships that you built while incarcerated remained the same or transformed after your release?
3. What impediments have there been to building, joining or maintaining community after you were released?
4. Was there anything that you think could have been helpful or more supportive in terms of helping you build the relationships or community that you wanted after you were released?

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